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‘A Bright Memory to Remain’

The Life and Work of Charles Sims RA (1873-1928)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of
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School of Arts and Social Sciences
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the life and work of the English painter Charles Sims RA (1873-1928). It takes the form of a monograph and examines key themes of Sims' career within a chronological framework. The study makes consistent reference to the Sims Archive – the artist's studio contents recently brought to light by the author in negotiation with the artist's family and currently in the possession of Northumbria University. For the first time Sims' working practices and motivations have been explored in detail, thus contributing to knowledge of this particular neglected painter and more generally allowing some additional insight into the problems besetting and opportunities afforded to British artists of his generation. Sims' career spanned a transitional period in British art history which is currently being reassessed by art historians: the debates surrounding the effects of European modernism on British art, the inevitable impact of the Great War and the search during the 1920s for a visual language appropriate to modern life. Sims negotiated disparate experiences and preoccupations in an interesting way, and produced a stylistically diverse body of work in his continued search, I argue, for an alternative to modern reality. He attempted the combination of ancient religions, past art and modern experience into pictorial idylls that were simultaneously familiar and unattainable. The thesis aims to explore Sims' inspiration and reassesses his career within the context of his better known contemporaries by cross-referencing information held in national and international collections, libraries and archives with the hitherto unseen material here.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that neither this thesis (nor part thereof) has been submitted for any other award and that it is the work of myself alone. I have completed the required training programme.

H. Cecilia Holmes

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Definitions

Definitions of common abbreviations in the text:

CS	Charles Sims
RA	Royal Academy of Arts/ Royal Academician
ARA	Associate Royal Academician
NEAC	New English Art Club
RWS	Royal Watercolour Society
IWM	Imperial War Museum
SSS	Stephen Sims' Scrapbook
GB3205	ARCHON National Archives Directory – reference number for Northumbria University Sims Archive

Introduction

Charles Sims was described at his death as a ‘painter of magic and fairies,’ who ‘talked about art with a sort of abandon and gusto, as a schoolboy talks of cricket.’¹ His works ‘illuminated the Academy’ for over thirty years and charmed critic and public alike.² Sims himself described his preferred subjects as ‘things to smile at... Children, dewy morning, the playful side of love, the coming of spring, a basket of flowers, butterflies, and the pagan creatures of woodland and stream discovered amongst the fanciful folk of a holiday existence.’³ For much of his career Sims took evident pleasure in the depiction of a delightful frivolity, although there was nothing frivolous about his paintings in terms of the artist’s skill or degree of technical innovation. But his reputation as an inventive and popular artist has not survived. Although well represented in gallery collections nationally and internationally, this research has revealed that until very recently, Sims’ works have tended largely to be consigned to the hidden depths of the stores – only viewable by appointment.⁴ Status has been denied him, perhaps because of his failure to fit easily into any particular trend or tradition, or possibly because of the suggestions of insanity that spread in the wake of his suicide. However, neither of these characteristics has precluded others from being recognised as significant, in fact these are often typical attributes of the modernist artist. Sims’ career has, nevertheless, been neglected by art historians until very recently. Indeed only in the last few decades has this period in modern British art generally begun to be considered in more detail, but art historians still tend to concentrate on artists more easily related either to the decorative modernism of Bloomsbury, for example, or the radical avant-gardism of Wyndham Lewis.⁵ The *Westminster Gazette* proved perspicacious in this regard in 1914 with the observation that ‘all that is not in a movement or in *the* movement, is not [regarded as]

modern.’⁶ The single detailed study of Sims’ life and work remains that of his son, included in Sims’ own posthumously published book, *Picture Making, Technique and Inspiration with a Critical Survey of his Work and Life by Alan Sims*, 1934. Following his father’s suicide Alan Sims was encouraged to write the family’s version of events by his mother Agnes, in order, perhaps, to preclude others from publishing less flattering material.⁷ But his account is much more anecdotal than critical, and so a broader and less partisan study is long overdue. The aim of this thesis is therefore to re-examine Sims’ oeuvre within the broader artistic and cultural context of the late Victorian era through to the inter-war period with close reference to the artist’s studio archive, currently in the possession of Northumbria University.

The Archive

The archive consists of notes, diary entries, sketches and other primary empirical evidence donated by the Sims family and hitherto unexamined. One crucial aspect of the research project has been to catalogue and organise this material, to cross-reference information and to establish an overview of Sims’ life and working practices. The archive arrived in simple categories of size: large items in a portfolio case, smaller drawings and books in boxes, which John Sims (the artist’s grandson) inherited after the death of his uncle Peter, who was presumably responsible for the packing of the objects before placing them in storage some years previously.⁸ Whilst the original ordering of any archive should be disturbed as little as possible, in this case it was decided that since this particular categorization was so arbitrary and as it was not arranged by the originator - Charles Sims himself - it was more useful to attempt a chronological organization.⁹ Material has therefore been ordered firstly in terms of physical description so that the different objects can be best preserved depending on their format

(oil sketch on panel, notebook, photograph), and then within these ‘series’ items have been numbered chronologically where possible.¹⁰

This intervention has raised interesting questions about the nature of archives, not least the moral implications of publishing or exhibiting material which the originator never intended to be in the public domain. The distinction that needs to be made about this particular archive is between sketches and drawings – made as part of a process towards a finished work, the value of which Sims as a teacher would have recognised – and the diary entries, letters and other unpublished written material more usually regarded as private. There is an argument that all information, once committed to paper, is potentially in the public domain; but there is a difference between designing and deliberately preparing something to be read by others, and accepting that one day it might be. These differences are particularly applicable in the case of photography. The archive includes numerous photographs of Sims and his family. Some are squared-up with pencil marks and were clearly used as studies from which to develop paintings, others are more formal studio portraits. One photograph preserved in Sims’ own scrapbook depicts the artist himself, somewhat incongruously attired in suit and tie, leaning on a stile and looking away from the camera **[fig.1]**. The lone figure is, rather self-consciously, enveloped within the surrounding foliage – deep within the rural idyll. There is no date or indication of where the photograph was taken – it is virtually useless to the historian in terms of depicting a particular time or place – but it is one reminder of Sims’ central preoccupations, the rural imagery that occupied him throughout his career. Raphael Samuel once pointed to the pitfalls of regarding historical photographs as evidence of a time past, for the photograph is always ‘painterly in origin and intention even... if documentary in form.’¹¹ There is little that is ‘documentary’ about

this particular photograph: it is Sims and it was taken on a summer day – we can tell this by the lush foliage; but why did this young Londoner, dressed in formal clothing, bury himself in the countryside and pose for a photograph as a solitary romantic figure gazing into the distance? The ‘idyll’ and Sims’ place within it is clearly carefully staged.



Fig.1 Photograph of Charles Sims, c1895, scrapbook in archive

The importance of immersion in an idyll or arcadia is of major concern to this thesis; but for Jeremy Seabrook it is also a common feature more generally of domestic photography. Snippets of the past, of sunny days in the countryside - albums full of people posing for the camera common to most homes – are, for Seabrook, idealized and constructed - ‘Golden Ages are inscribed even in the weather.’¹² But an Edwardian painter’s use of photography as a source of inspiration or a device for composition, and

particularly in this case where we have proof of Sims' working methods in the squared-up photographs in the archive, adds another layer of interest here. These family photographs are yet further removed from everyday life, they are not just posed as nostalgic souvenir photographs but, more than this, were deliberately staged as painterly compositions [fig.2].



Fig.2 CS, Photograph of Agnes Sims at Arran, c.1902, archive GB3025/1/3/19

Discussion about the nature of photography and the role of the archive alerts us to the conflation of fact and fiction inherent in biography. Even in autobiographical writing it is difficult sometimes to distinguish between fact and fiction as any reminiscences are

coloured by memory, nostalgia and personal interpretation. In this case, the source material has been potentially edited numerous times - whether consciously or not: by Sims himself who was presumably aware of what he left in his personal effects; by his wife who was at liberty after his death to remove any inflammatory or unflattering material; by his son Peter who packed it all away into storage; by his grandson John who made the ultimate decisions as to how much of the material was purely family business (certain photographs and letters were retained) and how much should be donated to the university; and finally here. In the process of analysing and using the material decisions have been made about the relevance of specific evidence and how to interpret it. Awareness of these processes of selection is particularly relevant in the presentation of the career of a man whose primary occupation was often the creation of fiction masquerading as fact – imaginative subjects depicted in a naturalist fashion. The experience of nostalgia is also a key element in an understanding of Sims and his work, referring here to the yearning for and construction of an often fictional pre-industrial idyll – a place distinct from lived reality.

A crucial component of the archive and invaluable to this study, is the collection of press-cuttings preserved in scrapbooks by Sims himself and his father Stephen. These provide a remarkably full record of published criticism of the artist's entire career and afford the opportunity to examine a broader range of periodicals than the usual portfolio relied upon by a study of this type. Stephen Sims evidently subscribed to a cuttings agency - the precursor to the internet search engine – who, for a fee, searched printed material for mentions of a given subject and provided copies to the client. His collection therefore includes reviews from far-flung and obscure publications – from the *Bombay Gazette* to the *Dundee Adventurer* – some of which had obviously bought reviews from

national newspapers and so duplicate mainstream opinion, but in other cases otherwise virtually untraceable quotations have been made available for study.¹³ Sims' own scrapbook includes cuttings, photographs and postcards of visual imagery that obviously interested him. The early drawings also preserved in the book date to the 1880s and provide evidence of his first artistic experiments but, more significantly, date the cuttings surrounding them. Thus, the pages devoted to newspaper sketches of ecclesiastical regalia – a preoccupation which we might expect to coincide with the war-time *Seven Sacraments* – can in fact be securely dated to a much earlier period (c.1895), proving that Sims' interest in church vestments and architecture was already well-established, not the product of a later whim. Furthermore, this scrapbook indicates his working process more generally, revealing how certain existing preoccupations resurfaced at particular moments in his career; a fact that appears to refute popular contemporary assertions that his final paintings, the *Spirituals*, were the sudden result of mental breakdown or psychosis.

Training and Early Years

Sims was extremely fortunate in that his father was supportive towards his ambition to paint, obviously followed reviews of his career with interest, and funded his protracted period of training between 1890 and 95. It is also evident from the studio records that Stephen Sims further encouraged his son by buying many of his early works when there was little evidence of other financial support.¹⁴ Sims' training in this early period was diverse - at the Government Art Training Schools at South Kensington, 1890-91, the Académie Julian in Paris, 1891-92, and the Royal Academy Schools, 1893-95. The training at Julian's in particular concentrated on the importance of drawing.¹⁵ Here much of the teaching took place in front of the life model, and since it was purely

practical, the students were encouraged to devote their private time to the study of anatomy, art history and theory.¹⁶ This approach seems to have suited Sims. He would continue the discipline of historical study throughout his career, constantly referring his work to that of past artists as well to his contemporaries. Julian's was a cosmopolitan environment, the atelier attracted many foreign students, especially English and American, who were disenchanted with the teaching methods of their native schools yet were unable to pass the rigorous entrance examinations at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and by the 1890s it had expanded into one of the most popular ateliers.¹⁷ Sims was instructed by Jules Lefébvre and Benjamin Constant. William Bouguereau was also a tutor at the time. As established Salon masters these three were 'extremely well qualified to pass on to their students a traditional French academic training.'¹⁸ On his return to England Sims set himself up as a landscape painter, an experience that left him, after a year, penniless and disheartened, and at this point his friend and fellow artist, Harold Speed, persuaded him to return to education by entering the Royal Academy Schools.¹⁹ His time in France made Sims more experienced and perhaps more sophisticated than his contemporaries at the Academy. He was very popular with his fellow students but his sense of humour and tendency towards arrogance made him perhaps something of a threat to the staff.²⁰ After nearly two years of rigorous academic training, he was expelled from the Schools in the summer of 1895, after a trivial incident involving the knocking down of a 'No Smoking' sign.²¹ He had though met Agnes, the daughter of John MacWhirter RA, who was to become his wife and, for many years, his model. They married in January 1897 and moved into MacWhirter's studios, Abbey Road, London. Agnes Sims kept a detailed social diary – a transcription of which is in the archive – invaluable to this research for providing the opportunity to

pinpoint specific engagements – attendance at exhibitions, concerts, theatres and so forth - and compare them to Sims' responses in his notes and paintings.

Survey of Recent Literature

This research is a detailed examination of an artist's career spanning what is now recognised as a crucial period in British art history - surrounding the Great War - that saw a temporary engagement with radical European modernism in this country. Several studies of the period have been published during the course of this research - none concentrating on Sims - which have provided an important context for my study.²² Lisa Tickner's *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, investigates artists representative of the disparate groupings she identifies within British art at the turn of the twentieth century, following the categories established at the 1914 Whitechapel Art Gallery Exhibition, *Twentieth Century Art: A Review of Modern Movements*, namely Vorticism, the Bloomsbury Group, the lyrical figure-in-landscape compositions of Augustus John, William Orpen and Henry Lamb, and representations of mundane everyday life by artists such as Walter Sickert.²³ The artists Tickner adopts for study are all part of the now recognised canon and, as such, her study reinforces existing important works - albeit very usefully elucidating the conditions of their production - ignoring lesser-known artists like Sims. In contrast, Kenneth McConkey's *Memory and Desire*, investigates the impetus behind works of once established (but now largely forgotten) Academicians during the same period – the 'old-guard' left behind by historical emphasis on the *avant-garde*. He examines paintings which he terms 'interesting for reasons which are not to do with hindsight hierarchies' by painters who 'did not consciously position themselves on the modernist map [but]... were in essence trying to be successful at the business of being a painter.'²⁴ McConkey's study is evidence of the

current preoccupation with artists who exemplify the transitional period in British art at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries, artists who were neither overtly avant-garde nor traditionally academic. Sims fits more neatly into McConkey's category than Tickner's – he was an Academician and had very little contact with the more radical exhibiting groups that mushroomed in the years before the First World War – but as David Peters Corbett has pointed out, his role at the Academy, especially in his years as Keeper, was always an ambiguous one: there were enough modern elements (impressionist handling of light and later simplification of form) in his work to make the establishment uncomfortable.²⁵ Corbett included a brief study of Sims in his 1997 *The Modernity of English Art*, in which he regards the artist as an example of the problems faced by the Academy painter attempting to engage with modernity – an example (he sees) ultimately of failure. Corbett has suggested that Sims' early career was largely tailored to commercial success, 'an acceptable, frothy, and attractive popular idiom,' and that it was only the onset of the Great War that directed him to more challenging subjects.²⁶ This view is admittedly borne out by Sims' early comments such as, 'a picture not worth £100 not worth doing,' and 'I would advise you to paint for money, as distinct from painting for Art's sake,' but it is also clear from his writings that this attitude was largely prompted by the need to provide for his wife and children.²⁷ Sims recorded discussions with his wife about the sorts of work he should concentrate on:

Discussed with Nan four possibilities – Corotesque figure and landscape pretty and factitious... - Pure landscape which we rejected as my preference is for the populous... - Muslin dresses with windy accessories – and Frans Hals peasants – the last two were most attractive to us, N would like me to paint a populous 'Plage.'²⁸

Not only did Sims consult his wife, he acted on her suggestions too. The 'Plage' that she suggested eventually became *An Island Festival*. Later on in the same diary entry though, Sims mused rather ruefully, 'How enjoyable could one just paint what one liked without thought for its saleability, I should enjoy painting heads and still life just now...

I must certainly treat myself to a large canvas sometime.'²⁹ So whilst the artist might necessarily have had one eye on the commercial aspects of his chosen career, there was a more fundamental and personal impetus underpinning his work. This thesis will argue that Sims' career deserves reinvestigation as illustrative of wider social and cultural concerns - and that he should not be dismissed as merely commercial. His notes and sketches bear constant witness to his engagement with the artistic preoccupations surrounding him; he was consistently receptive to new ideas and challenges and his studio contents reveal his interaction with contemporary debates and developments.³⁰ This study could be expanded in the future to examine Sims' equally interesting contemporaries marginalized - to a greater or lesser extent - by their association with the Academy and lack of interaction with the avant-garde. The wealth of detailed information in the archive available to this study demands an approach that takes into account the broader cultural and social climate. With so much background material sometimes the most interesting questions are raised by the missing pieces, and it is tempting perhaps to over-interpret or to rely on considered supposition, however as Tickner puts it, 'we are not excused from the archive,' and conclusions here are based on careful cross-referencing.³¹ The Sims archive is far more than a random collection of factual information, it represents evidence of the artist's thoughts and working processes, his experimentation, his disparate reactions to contemporary developments. Sims' varied working practices, the fact that on one morning he might make a *cliché-verre*, the next a rapid oil sketch, the next an intricately detailed pencil drawing, reveal him as continually striving to find an appropriate language to express what he felt and saw. He did not settle on one method, throughout his career he constantly questioned his motivations, moving from one style of working to the next. This eagerness, even compulsion to experiment, has meant that his oeuvre is stylistically fragmented. But this

thesis will argue that, far from seeing the diverse contents of his output as problematic – a possible reason for his lack of status - it should be viewed as an excitingly immediate response to the shifting preoccupations of his period which allows us detailed access to the range of emerging artistic possibilities.

Modernity and Symbolism

An important consideration here is the extent to which an artist who does not engage directly with ‘modernity,’ as the experience of modern life – with themes of urbanism or industrialization – can still be regarded as a ‘modern’ artist. Sims never painted urban scenes or city life, his preoccupation was with the (usually) pre-modern and idealised countryside.³² It has been pointed out that by the 1890s, when Sims’ career began, a good many experiments in modern painting were ‘not so much distinct from the sites and occasions of modernity as categorically apart from them.’³³ Images of urban and modern living had, by this stage, made way for modern images of the pre-modern idyll. Gauguin’s Breton and Tahitian reveries are prime examples of depictions of supposedly more authentic cultures removed from modernity. Recent studies have considered those of Sims’ British contemporaries who were also preoccupied with the depiction of rural scenes and pre-industrial idylls as a fundamental response to modern life.³⁴ Sims’ idyllic scenes were usually rooted in the rural landscape amidst its historical or mythological inhabitants and in this sense were representations of what is commonly termed the pastoral. His assorted and experimental approaches to the depiction of arcadias ranged through naturalism, late Pre-Raphaelitism, Impressionism and later a more abstract means of representation. His insistence on imagined or idealised scenes led Sims to an innovative blending of contemporary techniques; sometimes using impressionistic spontaneity to suggest transience, sometimes naturalistic fidelity to detail to imply a

faithful record of reality. But underpinning all of these diverse styles and techniques was his tendency towards the more general impulse of this time: the invention of a discrete pre-modern rural landscape.

Throughout the 1880s many British artists trained, like Sims, in French ateliers and working at French artistic colonies such as Pont-Aven or Quimperlé absorbed European methods. On their return to England, these artists extended notions of communities fostered by the French model and continued with the practice of naturalist painting. Rustic naturalism, influenced especially by the example of Jules Bastien-Lepage and Jean François Millet, involved the depiction of peasants and fisherfolk. Painters such as Stanhope Alexander Forbes, who was instrumental in the creation of the Cornish colony at Newlyn, presented the metropolitan audience with images of the picturesque rural and coastal population – far removed, it seemed, from industrialized modernity. But by the 1890s it was widely recognised that naturalism limited the artist and poet to ‘lived’ experience. The depiction of myth, legend or history was beyond the reach of those who espoused the technique, and as Kenneth McConkey has put it, ‘the possibility of using what you can see in order to paint what you cannot posed fundamental, theoretical questions which challenged the whole naturalist project.’³⁵ The rural landscape was in some cases, by the 90s, assigned a mystical otherness, a primordial authenticity. A shift from naturalism to symbolism had already been suggested to Sims’ generation, notably by Bastien-Lepage’s talismanic *Jeanne d’Arc Ecoutant les Voix*, of 1879. This had presented a formula by which the mystical/supernatural could be depicted in a naturalist manner – a method that would be very significant in Sims’ constructed arcadias.³⁶ Bastien’s personification of the ‘Voices’ alters the reading of his painting. Without the presence of the translucent figures hovering in the foliage, the image would be a simple

rendering of a peasant girl daydreaming in a cottage garden. Once the vision is made flesh, the meaning changes – Bastien's *Jeanne d'Arc* is transformed from a kitchen maid into a heroine answering her call to arms. Moreover, key to the painting's influence, is that it is the rural setting that allows for the visitation, 'in the midst of rambling untamed nature one would encounter the spiritual presences.'³⁷ In these terms, Bastien's influence, particularly on British artists of Sims' generation and on Sims himself, was in his juxtaposition of the rural and the symbolic. In 1881, two years after his *Jeanne d'Arc*, Bastien embarked on *La mort d'Ophelie*. His decision to paint *Ophelia* set another precedent - the naturalist depiction of Shakespearian themes - convincing enough to make a fictional character appear real.³⁸ This is an example of the amalgamation of techniques that has been called the 'nameless mixture of truth and legend which seemed to transgress accepted categories,' a major concern in this thesis.³⁹

Produced shortly after his expulsion from the Academy Schools, Sims' early paintings such as *What are these to you and me who deeply drink of wine?* 1895, and *The Vine*, 1896, are both concerned with this mixture of reality and history/fantasy also noted at the time in the work of Frank Brangwyn amongst others.⁴⁰ There are certainly striking formal similarities between *The Vine* [fig.3] and, for example, Brangwyn's *Blood of the Grape*, [fig.4] both shown in the 1896 Academy. Both are richly patterned bacchanals, both depict, we assume, contemporary life somehow removed though from mundane reality: Sims painted his fellow students (including multiple versions of Agnes) at a fancy-dress party, Brangwyn a distant foreign race. *What are these to you and me who deeply drink of wine?* [fig.5] and *The Vine* might also both be interpreted as Sims' attempts to crown his academic training (despite or perhaps because of his expulsion) with examples of history painting - large complex compositions usually completed in

the student artist's last summer of training as if to exhibit what he had learned, and usually based on didactic historical or literary themes.⁴¹ *The Vine* derives from a recognisable literary source - Robert Herrick's erotic poem of the same title, while the source of *What are these...* is less easily traced.⁴² Both paintings illustrate debauchery - the couple in *What are these...* reject Fame and Fortune as embodied by the two angels in favour of drunkenness. The decorative drapery and tightly-packed composition are similar to examples of Eastern European and Russian painting reproduced in contemporary journals such as *The Studio*. *What are these...* is also strikingly similar to Finnish painter Axel Gallen-Kallela's *The Symposium*, 1893. The elderly figure in the foreground of *The Vine* - dressed in robes of office so presumably representative of authority, and painted rather mischievously from a photograph of Ruskin - has his beard tugged by a young Bacchus. Established moral codes or standards of behaviour acceptable to a late-Victorian audience have been undermined - the party celebrates youthful hedonism, not traditional values.⁴³ The well-respected academician John MacWhirter, none too pleased at the various licentious depictions of his daughter Agnes, commented that Sims would 'do better' when he was 'less artistic.'⁴⁴ Despite leaving the Academy in disgrace, Sims demonstrated that he had absorbed the rigid training and could put it into practice in an ironic way.⁴⁵



Fig.3 CS, *The Vine*, 1895, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.4 Frank Brangwyn, *The Blood of the Grape*, RA 1896, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.5 CS, *What are These to you and me who deeply drink of wine?* 1895, oil on canvas, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds

These early paintings also compare with certain decorative, highly detailed tendencies within Pre-Raphaelitism undergoing renewed investigation at the time by other young artists such as John Liston Byam Shaw, Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale and John and Mary Young Hunter. Previously naturalist painters such as Elizabeth Adela Forbes and Thomas Cooper Gotch had been experimenting with the possibilities of late Pre-Raphaelitism when moving away from naturalism throughout the 1890s. The death of several Pre-Raphaelite painters around the turn of the century, and the consequent reappraisal of their work also thrust their ideas and concerns into the public arena; Percy Bate's *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters* published in 1901 provided a popular survey of their influence.⁴⁶ The *fin-de-siecle* revival of Pre-Raphaelitism adopted both Millais' heightened naturalism and Rossetti's claustrophobic symbolism. The Young Hunters and Fortescue Brickdale incorporated aspects of both, to produce what 'The Lay Figure' in *The Studio* in 1898 described as 'a logical evolution of the spirit of those two artists.'⁴⁷ Sims too adapted Rossetti's enclosed spatial composition with intricate

detail – *The Vine* is formally similar to Fortescue Brickdale’s *The Deceitfulness of Riches*, RA 1901, which displayed a ‘tension between early Pre-Raphaelite detail and late Rossettian intensity.’⁴⁸ One of the most influential paintings of the *fin-de-siècle* Academy exhibitions was Edwin Austin Abbey’s *Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the Lady Ann*, [fig.6] shown in 1896 and voted the ‘Picture of the Year.’ This painting presented an episode of English history in a decorative, emblematic fashion – re-enacted as pageant or as a frozen *tableau vivante*. Images like this, and the multitude that followed it, by John Young Hunter, Byam Shaw, Frank Cadogan Cowper et al, presented historical drama in a naturalistic idiom with ‘colour emblazoned onto the canvas’ emphasising the painterly artifice of the construction.⁴⁹ Pre-Raphaelitism offered an already existing framework to contemporary explorations of themes from English history and ideals of English cultural identity. Far from the originally radical premise of the style, according to Tim Barringer, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism could be seen at the end of the century as an authentically, even uniquely English vernacular art form,’ and in 1895 William Holman Hunt described it as ‘the hand-writing of the nation.’⁵⁰



Fig.6 Edwin Austin Abbey, *Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the Lady Ann*, 1896, oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

Sims' experiments with Pre-Raphaelitism did not concur wholly with those of his contemporaries, and it is these differences that make his early paintings particularly complex, both thematically and stylistically. A key distinction between his work, and for example that of Fortescue Brickdale, is that Sims' compositions were never wholly costumed. Invariably an element of contemporary dress was included as if to remind the viewer that what they saw was an artifice – a representation of a scene. One of his earliest post-Academy paintings, *The End of Mayday*, 1895, [fig.7] is an example. Here Sims depicts a group of costumed maidens surrounding a maypole. In the background is a dancing group, some of the foreground figures have, it appears, exhausted themselves and swoon into a lavish multi-coloured heap. The riotous mixture of textures and fabrics is heady and stifling, suggesting the scent of the background blossom. The male figure in the foreground is a self-portrait, in contemporary dress down to the unequivocally modern shoes, highly polished as if to draw attention. This motif of including himself in the idyll – *et in arcadia ego* – was short-lived and limited only to these few youthful paintings. The scene is set on a village green with thatched cottages in the background – the theme is of archaic English rural custom re-enacted in contemporary times – important at this time to a reinforcement of national tradition.⁵¹



Fig.7 CS, *The End of Mayday*, 1895, oil on canvas, Private Collection (Nick Revell)

The idealization of rural life during the 1890s has been directly related to the decreasing economic status of the countryside in this period. This, it is argued, coupled with the growth of cities, led to the increasing cultural significance of and nostalgia for rural innocence.⁵² Traditional rural pursuits such as maypole and morris dancing and the singing of folk-songs were imbued with a new meaning as celebrations of a national heritage.⁵³ Scenes from 'Merrie England,' an idealised 'Tudor-bethan' view of the countryside and its honest hardworking inhabitants, became popular - especially in the form of the pageant and in paintings of Shakespearian themes, which reinforced the nationalist impulse, particularly when the fictional narrative was rendered more

believable by a naturalistic Pre-Raphaelite handling. Turn of the century concepts of 'Englishness' and the deliberate reinvention or re-presentation of a supposedly national character have been widely investigated.⁵⁴ Sims' oeuvre encompasses many preoccupations explored by his contemporaries: the pictorial preservation of traditional customs and techniques in the face of mechanization; the shifting character of the rural space from a site of work to one of leisure; the mythologizing of the countryside and its inhabitants.⁵⁵ His motivations however do not appear to be prompted primarily by national pride or ideals of 'Englishness,' but rather by a deeply personal response to the locations in which he lived and worked; although as Paul Readman has recently suggested, there is an argument that at this time 'English national identity' was 'importantly predicated on love of locality.'⁵⁶ Also of major concern is Sims' insistent portrayal of healthy, idealised figures – a personal obsession that nonetheless echoes wider discourse in terms of the perceived link between degeneracy and urban life, and its foil – physical or mental fitness and rural life. A unique and complex individual, Sims produced work that clearly relates to a wider cultural context and his career can be investigated in these terms.

Chapter Outlines

The thesis examines the paintings produced in specific periods relating to particular iconographical themes, and chapters are organised accordingly. The first of these themes – central to Sims' output as a whole – is the depiction of children and childhood. His 1896 painting, simply entitled *Childhood*, provides an introduction to the theme and gave Sims a route out of the claustrophobic symbolism and intense detail of *The Vine* towards the breezy *plein-airisme* of his 'Arran' paintings. The first chapter concentrates on the period from c1896-1905 and investigates Sims' increasing involvement with

aspects of impressionism. This coincides with the infancy of his two eldest sons, a subject that fascinated and delighted the artist, and gave him the opportunity to paint real life. Sims' scenes of maternity are perhaps those for which he is best remembered, and certainly those on which he built his reputation. The studies of his wife and children in the archive are tender and intimate, but they also presented Sims with the opportunity to experiment with effects of light and atmosphere on a directly observed scene and coincided with other artists' representations of happy, healthy children playing on beaches – a popular theme indicative of an increasing awareness of the benefits of fresh sea air. Representations of children in this period explored a range of symbolic implications, from notions of childhood innocence to fears of degeneracy and infant mortality, Sims' paintings of his young sons are examples of these more general preoccupations.

Chapter Two (1906-10) investigates Sims' return to more literary inspiration, but now he assimilates his fictional subjects with the naturalist observation and impressionist brushwork acquired on Arran. The truth to appearances and spontaneous brevity suggested by these techniques crucially - I argue - implies that these scenes had been fleetingly observed and were tethered in reality. Paintings such as *An Island Festival* and *The Fountain* provoked widespread attention and this period saw the artist's first real commercial success in solo exhibitions at the Leicester Galleries (in 1906 and 1910) and his election as ARA in 1908. He was also preoccupied at this time with the contemporary literary and artistic interest in eighteenth century *fêtes-galantes*, and the loosely worked impressionism he had now adopted allowed for particularly evocative glimpses of this world of innocent pleasure-seeking. Studies in the archive are evidence of Sims' technique at this point of working out a composition by allowing his medium

to lead him – he did not sketch out elaborate plans but worked in a fluid style apparently enjoying and exploiting the flexibility this gave him. This flexibility led ultimately to rather chaotic canvasses such as *Legend* and *The Shower*, both 1911, and the next chapter sees his necessary retreat towards a more ordered design.

The third chapter (1910-1914) examines Sims' increasing preoccupation with Christian imagery and Italian Primitivism. His eventual withdrawal from the unruly paganism of previous years led him to the depiction of contemplative spiritual ceremonies. The paintings from this period develop into more tranquil, disciplined compositions such as *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912. The sketchpads in the archive are full of intricate pencil and ink drawings experimenting with the theme of figures in landscapes. Again, these concerns relate to the wider artistic context, Sims was by no means alone in his interest. The chapter investigates his experiments with sacred imagery in relation to his contemporaries, the Slade School 'gospel of Giotto and Cézanne,' the coincidence with contemporary critic Laurence Binyon's particular ideals of modernism, and an increasing interest in the work of past artists, for example William Blake.⁵⁷ Sims' particular method of negotiating the essential and spiritually-charged landscape advocated by Binyon and reflecting wider artistic and critical development of the period was to adopt a series of past styles – to depict sacred themes by deliberately following the precedents of others and to quote from these established sources in collaged arrangements.

Chapter Four (1914-1919) focuses on the Great War. It considers Sims' *Seven Sacraments*, the culmination of his engagement with *quattrocento* principles. Sims travelled to France in 1917 to collect material for a Canadian War Memorial

commission and again in late 1918 as an Official War Artist. The archive contains plein-air oil sketches on small wooden panels made of the abandoned German front line at Arras. Information in the archive has been cross-referenced with the material at the Imperial War Museum Archives, providing a clearer picture both of Sims' attitude to the commission and the authorities' view of him. John Sims has also donated some letters written to his grandfather by Sir William Orpen – these give interesting detail about their time together in France. The Sims family did not escape personal tragedy in the war - the eldest son, John, was killed just after his sixteenth birthday. This loss has often been cited as a turning point in Sims' career and the catalyst towards his perceived mental instability. But this chapter will argue that though undoubtedly a devastating blow, John's death was merely part of a chain of events that intensified Sims' search for a refuge from reality. The major effect that the war had on Sims' work was that in 1915 the family had moved back to London from Sussex – the artist was no longer surrounded by his beloved rural landscape and began to rely on introspective imagery. The injured and maimed soldiers that he had witnessed also intensified his existing preoccupation with idealized bodies, leading ultimately to a total retreat from corporeality towards the abstract depiction of the soul.

Chapter Five (1920-26) concentrates on the period of Sims' greatest professional success and notoriety. After his election as Keeper of the Academy Schools in 1920, he was as in demand as a society portrait painter as his contemporaries Orpen, Ambrose McEvoy and John Lavery. His 1922 contribution to the Academy Exhibition, *The Countess of Rocksavage and her Son*, was hailed 'Picture of the Year' and effectively brought to an end the era of Edwardian portraiture as exemplified by its leading light – John Singer Sargent. The painting, of Sybil Rocksavage, née Sassoon, marked the most

commercially successful point in his career and his entrance into fashionable society. But in 1924 his portrait of King George V, commissioned by the Academy, did not attract the positive reception he had hoped for and was publicly destroyed. Sims fled to America in the late 20s, spending more and more time there as his marriage foundered and his relationship with the Academy disintegrated, leading to his resignation as Keeper in 1926. This chapter examines Sims' struggles to make his work relevant to the experience of 20s Britain and his growing disillusionment with the metropolitan art establishment. He explored a range of decorative idioms in his portraiture and worked on high-profile mural commissions - notably at St. Stephen's Hall, Palace of Westminster - but his efforts to reconcile his personal preoccupations to the public expectations of his role were unsuccessful, leading him ever further into introspection and the genesis of his *Spirituals*.

Chapter Six investigates the extraordinary series of *Spirituals* that were exhibited soon after the artist's death in 1928. This body of work was generally seen at the time as an abrupt break with all of his previous concerns and led to the accusations of insanity that have since dogged his reputation.⁵⁸ Sketches in the archive reveal the amount of time and planning (over a period of 2 years) that went into these paintings, suggesting that they could not be merely the product of sudden mental instability. I argue that although stylistically different from his previous works, these paintings offer yet another alternative to material, everyday reality and an attempt to depict subjective emotion. As such the *Spirituals* should properly be regarded as a continuation of the central aims Sims grappled with throughout his career. This final series is unequivocally modern in that it represents *his* experience of modernity and modern life and is illustrative of his

attempts to redeem the futility of corporeal existence with a yearning for utopian spirituality.⁵⁹

This research reveals that Charles Sims' over-riding ambition was the creation of a discrete idyll removed from everyday reality and material existence, an aim that led him through a range of stylistic techniques. In pursuit of this he attempted to merge ancient and modern, sacred and secular, into a unity emblematic of continuity through the ages, and representative of human experience. His *Daily Mail* obituary quoted Sims' friend Percy Lumley-Ellis, who remembered once that 'when someone remarked that with the discovery of television there would be no need of pictures, he [Sims] exclaimed: "Then art would be freed at last, and we could paint ideas."'”⁶⁰ The thesis explores the various forms that his attempts to 'paint ideas' took and reveals an artist continually searching for a reconciliation between his physical experience of modern life and his immersion in the spiritual world of his imagination. At the junction between the two, supernatural creatures appear on Edwardian picnic tables, statues come to life, and gardens are filled with the laughter of *putti*. Why then should souls and thoughts not also become flesh, captured on canvas by a man who could show us what they looked like?

¹ R. R. Tatlock, *Daily Telegraph*, 18th April 1928 (page number unknown, cutting from Tate Gallery Archive).

² Alan Sims in Charles Sims, *Picture Making, Technique and Inspiration with a Critical Survey of his Work and Life by Alan Sims*, London: Seeley and Co. Ltd. 1934, p.102.

³ Sims *ibid.*, p.112.

⁴ This has begun to change. Bury Art Gallery were displaying their major watercolour *The Striped Skirt* (c1904) when I visited in July 2003. The Royal Academy hung *Clio and the Children* throughout the summer of 2004, and Tate Britain had *The Wood Beyond the World* on show in November 2004.

⁵ See such art historians as Wendy Baron, Charles Harrison, Bruce Laughton, Kenneth McConkey, Richard Shone and, more recently, David Peters Corbett and Lisa Tickner. Sims has been mentioned by McConkey and examined briefly by Corbett.

⁶ 'JMM,' *Westminster Gazette*, 21st May 1914, as reproduced in Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p.9.

⁷ Alan's son John has made it clear in discussion with the author that in his opinion this was the impetus behind the publication.

⁸ To distinguish an archive from a collection, an archive represents a body of articles that relate to each other in some way but are not usually collated deliberately and arrive at a depository from a single source. Peter Sims, (1909-99) Charles and Agnes' youngest son, died recently. His father's studio contents were discovered unexpectedly by the remaining family when going through his effects which had long been in store. The Sims family were keen that the material should be available for scholarly research. I was fortunate enough to make contact with John Sims in 2000, shortly after he had taken possession of it and was able to negotiate first its loan and then donation to the university.

⁹ Thanks to Margaret Crockett and Janet Foster of The Archive-Skills Consultancy for their advice on this matter.

¹⁰ There remains material that I have not been able to date accurately – sketches of sea or skylscapes for example – these are grouped together at the end of the numerical sequences.

¹¹ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Vol. 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London and New York: Verso, 1994, p.319.

¹² Jeremy Seabrook, 'My life is in that box,' *Ten*.8, no. 34. 1989, pp.34-41.

¹³ The first five pages of the book covering 1907-1921 hold cuttings from some 51 disparate publications. The titles are all handwritten but unfortunately the page numbers and dates are missing. Nonetheless this is an extremely valuable resource when gauging critical opinion of Sims' reception. Throughout the thesis, when citing these cuttings, as much information as is available is included and quotations from Stephen Sims' Scrapbooks (abbreviated to SSS) are clearly marked as such.

¹⁴ Stephen Sims and John MacWhirter both bought (or were 'presented' with) a major part of Sims' early output. It was not until 1906, and his first exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, that Sims really began to sell his work professionally and consistently.

¹⁵ See Catherine Fehrer, 'New Light on the Académie Julian and its Founder (Rodolphe Julian),' in *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, ser.6, v.103, May/June 1984, pp.207-16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.213. Sims' sketchpads (many of them pocket-sized) hold many examples of rapid on the spot sketches made throughout his career. He was rarely without the means to scribble down a reference, however brief.

¹⁷ Although there were no official entrance requirements at Julian's, by the 1890s the changing artistic climate and the popularity of the atelier meant that some students were rejected. In the light of this, and more particularly that Henri Matisse was one of those denied entry in 1892, it would seem that Sims must have shown considerable aptitude to have been accepted in 1891.

¹⁸ Fehrer, *op. cit.*, p.209. This training emphasized the importance of responding to a subject directly, of getting ideas down on paper – a typical instruction from Lefébvre was to, 'strike out an idea of the *action*. Get something to correct. Don't feel you're wrong – take straight lines.' As cited in Fehrer, *ibid.*, p.213.

¹⁹ However depressing this experience might have been it also introduced Sims to the discipline of painting *en plein air*, and reinforced his preoccupation with rural scenes.

²⁰ Harold Speed's eulogy of his friend's life and work gives a clue as to Sims' character and personality: 'the Schools were conducted on Spanish Inquisition lines, and we were asked by the Curator to remember that we were in a 'Royal Institution.'... A Burlesque on the Academy, written by [Sims] was the result... acted with much success... to the huge delight of a large audience and the discomfort of distinguished Academicians in the front row.' Harold Speed, 'Charles Sims RA,' *Old Watercolour Society Club*, 6th

Annual, Vol. 1, 1928-29, p.47. The revue was called *Virginibus Puerisque in Arte by a "Mutilated Hermes"* this was a reference to Sims' own lameness. See programme in Sims' Scrapbook, May 29th and 31st 1894.

²¹ A petition held in the Academy archives illustrates the regard with which he was held by his fellow students; some 48 of them (including John Young Hunter and Henry Poole) risked expulsion themselves by signing it in protest. Royal Academy Collection of Correspondence, no. RAC/5/41.

²² Two significant Barbican exhibitions that have been staged over the last two decades - John Christian's *The Last Romantics*, in 1989, which reintroduced previously marginalized British artists (including Sims) and Kenneth McConkey's 1995 *Impressionism in Britain*, opened the forum for discussion of the period.

²³ See Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, 2000, op. cit., pp.49-78.

²⁴ Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire: Painting in Britain and Ireland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ He exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1898, 99 and 1901 and was Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools from 1920-26. David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, p.200.

²⁶ Corbett, *ibid.*, p.202.

²⁷ Sims' Diary, c1905 and Sims, *Picture Making*, p.9.

²⁸ Sims' Diary, Dec. 7th 1905.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Evidence of this will be footnoted throughout the thesis.

³¹ Tickner, op. cit., p.213.

³² The closest Sims came to painting the urban landscape was in his early sketches of Bruges (1904-5) which he altered 'out of all recognition with imaginary marble urns and statuary and fountains,' (Alan Sims, op. cit., p.103) and on his return to London during the war in his *Lower Mall, Hammersmith, Looking towards Chiswick*, c1915, in which he concentrates on the 'natural' elements of the scene, the river, trees and sky.

³³ Charles Harrison, *Modernism, Movements in Modern Art*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997, p.4.

³⁴ See for example Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

³⁵ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., p.141.

³⁶ *Jeanne d'Arc* was widely reproduced in the British art press and it is likely that Sims was aware of its significance. Bastien spent time in England and was known to have admired some of the Pre-Raphaelites' painting, especially their fidelity to nature which allowed for a symbolic subtext. Kenneth McConkey summed up Bastien's oeuvre thus: 'It provided a consensus, it incorporated elements, of Pre-Raphaelitism, realism and plein-air and its strength lay in doing what had been done before only doing it better... all the realisms of the mid-century became realistic.' McConkey, 'The Bouguereau of the Naturalists: Bastien Lepage and British Art,' *Art History*, Vol. 1, no.3, Sept 1978, pp.371-379.

³⁷ Kenneth McConkey, 'Listening to the Voices: A Study of some aspects of Jules Bastien-Lepage's 'Joan of Arc Listening to the Voices',' *Arts Magazine*, January 1982, p.156.

³⁸ It seems that Bastien's inspiration to tackle a Shakespearian subject was as a result of a conversation with the actor Henry Irving on a trip to England in 1880 (Irving's *Hamlet* of 1879 had been received with critical acclaim). See Marie-Madeleine Aubrun, *Jules Bastien-Lepage 1848-1884*, Chiffolleau, 1985,

p.218. In a letter to his friend Charles Baude, Bastien described his painting as 'a really touching Ophelia, as heartrending as if one actually saw her.' Bastien-Lepage, August 1881, as reproduced in Andre Theuriot, *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art, A Memoir; Bastien-Lepage as Artist by George Clausen ARWS; Modern Realism in Painting by Walter Sickert, NEAC and A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff by Mathilde Blind*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892.

³⁹ Kenneth McConkey, 'Listening to the Voices,' op. cit., p.156. Although never completed, the atmospheric work is emotionally charged and illustrates the artist's compositional trick of placing the viewer in subordination to the figures in the painting. In this case, in order to look at the figure from this angle, the viewer would have to be actually in the river. He painted the subject twice more, in 1894 and 1910. Significant in this respect too was John William Waterhouse who began exhibiting in the 1870s. His technique mixed the *plein airisme* of the Rustic Naturalists, the loose flowing brushwork of the Impressionists and the romantic subject matter of Pre-Raphaelitism. His preoccupation was with literary and mythical sources, especially English ones such as Shakespeare and Tennyson. When Waterhouse produced his first *Ophelia* in 1889 it is possible that he had seen Bastien-Lepage's version in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1885. Bastien-Lepage's *Jeanne d'Arc* had also been recently exhibited in the 1889 Exposition Universelle. It is also highly likely that he had seen Millais' famous 1852 *Ophelia* – widely reproduced by this time.

⁴⁰ See for example, *Art Journal*, 1906, p.184.

⁴¹ For a useful investigation of history painting in the 19th century see Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd, guest eds. *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol.6, no.1, 2005.

⁴² See *The Poems of Robert Herrick*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, p.17.

⁴³ Both paintings therefore perhaps play on contemporary fears of degeneracy, specifically relating to the current Temperance debates. See Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., pp.154-6.

⁴⁴ As cited by Alan Sims in Sims, op. cit., p.101.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of some of Sims' contemporaries and their interaction with history painting see Emma Chambers, 'Redefining History Painting in the Academy: The Summer Composition Competition at the Slade School of Fine Art, 1898 –1925,' in *Visual Culture in Britain*, op. cit., p.79.

⁴⁶ Ford Madox Brown died in 1893, and John Everett Millais in 1896 whilst the critic and champion of Pre-Raphaelitism, John Ruskin, died in 1900. Percy H. Bate, *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters: Their Associates and Successors*, London: George Bell and Sons, 1901.

⁴⁷ 'The Lay Figure,' *The Studio*, Vol. XIII, 1898, p.70.

⁴⁸ Kenneth McConkey, 'Edwardian Pre-Raphaelites,' in *Edwardian Pre-Raphaelites: The Art of John and Mary Young Hunter*, London: Pym's Gallery exhibition catalogue, 2000, p.16. *The Deceitfulness of Riches* is illustrated in McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit. p.175.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.12.

⁵⁰ Tim Barringer, 'Not a "modern" as the word is now understood'? Byam Shaw, imperialism and the poetics of professional society,' pp.64-83 in David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, eds. *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.77. William Holman Hunt, *The Obligations of the Universities towards Art*, London, H. Frowde, 1895, as quoted in Barringer, *ibid.*, p.77.

⁵¹ The sickle moon in the top right is reminiscent of Samuel Palmer, and the patterned formation of the background figures similar to the drawings of Conder and Beardsley.

⁵² See particularly Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1973, p.120.

⁵³ Cecil Sharp produced an archive of traditional folk tunes and stories, whilst Janet Blunt was collating Morris tunes and dances in Oxfordshire. Sharp's arrangement of traditional British folk-songs was a collaboration with composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, first published as a collection by Novello in 1908.

⁵⁴ See for example Robert Colls, and Philip Dodd, eds. *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, London: Croom Helm, 1987, and David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell, eds., *Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940*. 'Studies in British Art 10,' Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and the Yale Centre for British Art, 2002.

⁵⁵ See respectively George Clausen's 'peasant pictures,' Laura Knight and Henry Scott Tuke's images of happy healthy youths and children playing in and around the sea, and William Stott of Oldham and Ernest Parton's depictions of wooded glades with titles such as *The Faerie Wood*.

⁵⁶ Paul Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture c.1890-1914,' *Past and Present*, no. 186, February 2005, p.176.

⁵⁷ Timothy Hyman, 'Stanley Spencer: Angels and Dirt' in Timothy Hyman and Patrick Wright eds. *Stanley Spencer*, London: Tate Publishing, 2001, p.12.

⁵⁸ These rumours were fuelled by the circumstances of his death – he took his own life by jumping from a viaduct in the Scottish borders – and led to his *Spirituals* being dismissed by critics as the product of mental crisis, Frank Dicksee thought that it would be 'kinder' not to exhibit them, (quote from the *Daily Express*, unknown issue, press cutting from Tate Gallery Archive).

⁵⁹ David Peters Corbett and Ysanne Holt have both examined Sims' *Spirituals*. In *The Modernity of English Art* Corbett concludes that the paintings were the failed attempt of an Academy artist to engage with modernist practice, they represented the appearance of modernism without anything modern to say. Holt's more recent, unpublished, study argues that Sims' paintings offer a glimpse of the dysphoria and turmoil of the experience of twenties Britain and she suggests a wide range of possible influences on the artist.

⁶⁰ *Daily Mail*, undated, 1928, (SSS).

Chapter One: ‘The Gossamer Quests of Childhood’

The child is a recurring motif throughout the career of Charles Sims, from portrait studies, to symbolist muses, to allegorical compositions. By 1897, when he exhibited his first major canvas on the theme, *Childhood*, [fig.8] at the Royal Academy, representations of the child in art and literature were varied and plentiful. The specific late Victorian cult of the child has now been widely researched.¹ Children in both art and literature symbolised disparate preoccupations, from fears of urban degeneracy and the consequent interest in simpler, healthier rural pursuits, to adult anxieties over the loss of innocence, to concerns about infant mortality.² Artistic representations of childhood took on a range of forms from naturalism to fancy-dress medievalism to impressionism. In 1897, for example, in that same Academy summer show, Samuel Melton Fisher exhibited his naturalist rendition of *A Children's Picnic*, Thomas Cooper Gotch, the medievalist symbolism of *The Heir to All the Ages*, Mouat Loudan and Fred Morgan the sunny floral idylls, *Butterflies*, and *Out of Reach*, Henry Herbert La Thangue, *A Summer Morning*, Elizabeth Forbes a broadly handled portrait of her son, *Alec Forbes*, and G. P. Jacomb-Hood, a neo-classical scene, *The Little Swineherd*. Henry Scott Tuke exhibited one of his perennial images of semi-nude young lads on the seashore, *Beside Green Waters*, and Walter Langley, a poverty-stricken Newlyn interior with hungry children and their desperate mother.³ All of these took children as their subject, but the handling, style and technique was quite disparate. Each representation, however, impressed upon the child a weight of symbolic meaning – even portraits tended to symbolic associations, like Elizabeth Forbes' image of her young son with its beaten copper halo framing the boy's head. Child portraits of the time typically

applied velvet breeches and rakish poses for boys and the angelic silhouette of starched white pinafores for girls.⁴ More explicitly allegorical still was Alfred Drury's *Age of Innocence*, a life-size bronze bust of a young girl also in the 1897 Academy. Other British artists to explore the theme of childhood during the 1890s and at the turn of the century, although handling it in vastly differing ways, include Frank Bramley, Edward Atkinson Hornel and J. E. Christie, all of whom provide interesting comparisons to Sims. Bramley's naturalism with symbolic undercurrents, Hornel's richly impasted interweavings of children in densely wooded or flower filled rural idylls, and Christie's naturalist renderings of literary themes all perhaps owe something to John Singer Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885, and although they tended to avoid the commercial sentimentality of Millais' *Bubbles*, or the mawkishness of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, both of 1886, they come from a world in which the image of the child, for all its seeming innocence, had a subtext. This is the context in which *Childhood* appeared. This chapter seeks to disentangle the complexities of firstly, thematic and then stylistic content exhibited in this painting, and to then examine the series of breezy idylls Sims produced in the first years of the 20th century, the paintings of his wife and children playing on the beach at Arran, which illustrate his closest experiments with impressionism.

Childhood portrays some fifty children, from infancy to about ten years old, playing in a wild rural space or garden. The nearby presence of urban reality, present in the chimneys on the horizon, acts as the necessary foil to the rural setting. The building in the background looks like a school or orphanage and the sense is that the children have been released into the field. It is not clear whether these are city children let free in the natural world or if they

have merely spilled out of school, but there is a definite feeling of exuberant movement throughout. The children are arranged in groups and engaged in various activities. The central group towards the rear of the composition let balloons loose into the air, while in the left-hand foreground a trio of younger children make daisy chains, and the older group on the right conduct a rather bizarre mock funeral ceremony. These varied activities lead the eye around the canvas, from the most brightly lit area to the darkest. The painting, for the *Academy Notes*, was an allegory, a symbolic representation of life and death.⁵ *Childhood* is full of references to lost innocence and transient beauty. Balloons and butterflies signify the mental freedom and imaginative flights of fancy permitted only in childhood, concepts to which Sims laid paramount claim.⁶ The warm evening light that bathes the scene pinpoints a specific time of day – just before dusk, the moment when youth will fade.⁷ Between 1897 when the painting was exhibited at the Academy and 1900 when it was shown at the Paris Salon, Sims contributed each year to the Academy summer show with an eclectic range of canvasses as if testing out the market: in 1898 with his first foray into fairyland, *A Fairy's Wooing*; *The Kingdom of Heaven* in 1899, and the experimental nudes-in-a-landscape of *In Elysium* in 1900. During this period he also exhibited at the New English Art Club, with a range of images possibly strategically directed at the alternative audience – to be examined later in the chapter. *The Kingdom of Heaven* [fig.9] extends and simplifies aspects of *Childhood* but retains a reliance on symbolic narrative. The random groups of children now form a seraphic queue. They are dressed in toga-like robes and process with branches of spring blossom.



Fig.8 CS, *Childhood*, 1896, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Fig.9 CS, *The Kingdom of Heaven*, 1899, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

Whilst comparisons in subject here – the procession – may be drawn between this and later paintings such as Stanhope Forbes' *Gala Day at Newlyn*, 1907, and Frank Bramley's *Grasmere Rushbearing*, 1905, the clearest comparison is with another Bramley – *For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven*, 1891, [fig.10] shown in the Academy and widely reproduced.⁸ The distinctions between these two paintings raise questions again of the uses of naturalism, truth to appearances, and behind this, Sims' current ambition towards symbolist content. Bramley's was a record of an all too familiar ceremony – the death of a child in the Cornish community in which he lived and worked – now transformed by Sims, for *The Times*, into 'a kind of celestial school feast.'⁹ Sims had appropriated a section of Bramley's biblical title and turned the procession of Newlyn mourners at the funeral of a child into a representation of heaven itself. His children, watched over by maidens, wind past the viewer bearing sprigs of apple blossom. The figures on the picture plane, particularly the one facing backwards into the scene, are cropped and almost obscured by their flowers.¹⁰ The ambiguities of the composition anticipated the riotous celebration of *An Island Festival*, 1907, and the flower-strewn field would return in *The Month of Mary* and *The Coming of Spring*, both 1912. Oddly, for a painting ostensibly of dead children, Sims has managed not to be maudlin, his implication appears not that they have arrived in heaven because they are dead, but that pretty children inhabit the heavenly garden that awaits the righteous. This is a celebratory image with none of the eeriness one might expect if, for example, it had been painted by Gotch, and without the local detail of Bramley's record of a real scene. The progression from the bare tree in the background from which the children seem to emerge, to the spring blossom that they carry implies the reawakening of the year.¹¹ Sims replaced the warm evening light and high summer of *Childhood* with the cool

silvery light and crocuses of an early morning in spring. The sense is of expectation, of new beginnings, not of *Childhood's* imminent autumnal darkness and intimations of lost youth.

In 1899 J. E. Christie's *Gather ye Rosebuds While Ye May, Old Time is Still A-Flying*, also explored notions of childhood and death.¹² Like *Childhood*, this depicted a group of children in contemporary dress skipping through a wooded glade, but *Gather ye Rosebuds* implied more overtly the connection between the passing of childhood innocence and the disappearing rural scene.¹³ Describing *Vanity Fair*, another Christie exhibited in 1897 at the NEAC, *The Studio* recognised the power of the artist's mixture of naturalism and symbolism, for the allegory was made 'to most men more persuasive and intelligible by its modern dressing.'¹⁴ It was widely recognised by the end of the 1890s that a naturalistic technique could communicate a symbolic allegory with more coherence and immediacy to the contemporary audience. Sims' *Childhood* should be viewed in this context: his application of directional lighting, local colour and contemporary dress made the allegorical content of his painting more legible to his viewers. If, however, *Childhood* is compared to Melton Fisher's *A Children's Picnic*, [fig.11] one can see that Sims has here avoided complete naturalism. Both painters depict middle-class children in contemporary clothing, surrounded by toys in parks or gardens. But, whilst Sims creates a panoramic, distanced view of the scene, Fisher's figures are close to the picture plane and emerge as individuals. *A Children's Picnic* records a specific everyday occasion, just as the middle-class children and fashionable Chinese lanterns also site *Carnation, Lily, Lily Rose* as a painting essentially of modern life – an impressionist idyll.



Fig.10 Frank Bramley, *For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven*, 1891, oil on canvas, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki



Fig.11 Samuel Melton Fisher, *A Children's Picnic*, RA 1898, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

By contrast, Sims' broader handling and more decorative aesthetic locate *Childhood* more typically as an allegory on a state of innocence in nature. Hornel's animated tapestries of children almost subsumed amongst their surrounding foliage were yet further removed from reality and lived experience and so Sims' *Childhood* falls between the naturalism of Melton Fisher and Hornel's decorative symbolism, exhibiting characteristics of both, but ultimately following the example of neither.

Sims panoramic composition was more ambitious in scope than of these contemporaries. He engaged the current artistic and cultural preoccupations regarding children and childhood in a series of set-piece groupings amalgamated into one scene, and experimented with the effect of atmospheric lighting on a naturalist composition so as to demonstrate his skill on a large scale (96" x 54"). This was an ambitious undertaking for a recently trained twenty-four year old, designed to appeal to the Academy audience, and the effort was rewarded. Reviews of the painting were positive, for the *Times* it was a 'striking picture... which well deserve[d] its "centre",' and when it was shown in the Paris Salon in 1900 the *Revue de la Jeunesse* described it as 'vraiment exquise.'¹⁵ *Childhood* was also a crucial step in Sims' technical development. For the reviewer of the *Art Journal*, it was 'a work of the greatest promise' and evidenced 'a remarkable knowledge and understanding of full light.'¹⁶ This review concentrates on Sims' use of light and atmosphere rather than on his subject matter. The soft evening light gives unity and continuity to the scene although, for the *Magazine of Art*, confusing light and weather, the artist had merely painted an 'inexplicably foggy afternoon.'¹⁷ Atmosphere was a particular preoccupation of critics by now sensitive to Impressionism and the 'understanding of full light' over-rode content.¹⁸

Indeed it is only in *Academy Notes* that the painting was analysed in a thematic sense at all as a 'pessimistic allegory of life.'¹⁹

Sims' contributions to the Academy of 1898, *A Fairy's Wooing* and *In Elysium*, 1900, (whereabouts of both unknown) extended the refuge from reality offered by the rural setting of *Childhood*. These canvasses, the first a scene of pure fantasy, and the latter, of nudes in the dappled shade of an overgrown orchard, took different implications; the first the potential presence of supernatural creatures in the rural idyll, and the second, of the health and vitality of country living.²⁰ But perhaps in response to those reviews of *Childhood* that concentrated on his handling of light, Sims temporarily abandoned theatrical or literary sources for more objective observation, possibly in an attempt to pursue this critical appreciation. The paintings produced between 1901 and c1905 - the 'Arran' series - represents the high point of what were to be his impressionist renderings of everyday contemporary life.²¹

Coinciding with the infancy of his first two sons, John born in October 1898, and Alan in April 1901, Sims began a body of work including *The Top o' the Hill*, and *The Nest*, both 1901, *Playmates*, *A Summer Afternoon* and *Waterbabies*, all 1902, *Sunshine and Wind*, *Butterflies*, 1903, and *The Kite*, 1905. These were all playful sketches of his wife and children on the sunny beaches and headlands of the Isle of Arran. The Sims family summer holidays in 1902 and 1903 were spent there, and here the inspiration for his most impressionistic work to date was generated.²²



Fig.12 CS, *In the Fields*, 1899, oil on canvas, Private Collection (John Sims)

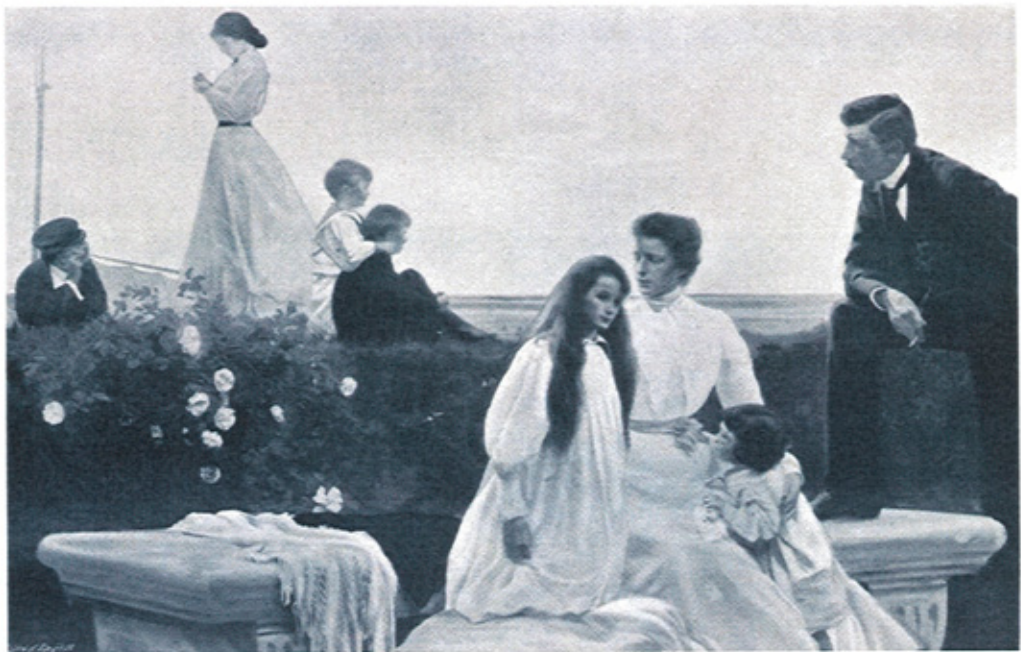


Fig.13 CS, *Spreading Their Wings*, RA 1901, oil on canvas, destroyed

But this phase began with *In the Fields*, 1899 [fig.12] - one of the few submissions he made to the New English Art Club, and almost certainly directed towards this forum rather than the Academy. The painting, of Agnes and John playing in a field, dates from the family's move away from the city to Essex. Sims became progressively more affected by his surroundings, and as will become clear in later chapters, his work was fundamentally influenced by his immersion in the English countryside. At this point, and having experimented with the theme in *Childhood*, he had infant models on hand (Alan Sims described himself as being of 'exactly the right colour') and the time and inspiration to explore the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere that would make his name.²³ *In the Fields* was the first painting preoccupied with sunlight glancing off muslin dresses, of contemporary figures enveloped in the haze of atmospheric sunshine. There is no indication here of supernatural forces or symbolic undertones. Sims was depicting an English rural idyll of rolling hills and hedgerows bathed in the golden light of midsummer, perhaps comparable to Philip Wilson Steer's *Children Playing with a Dog, Ludlow*, of 1898/9.²⁴

In July 1900, after a trip to Paris to view *Childhood* in the Salon, and to attend the Paris Exposition, Sims embarked upon the ambitious *Spreading Their Wings* [fig.13].²⁵ This painting perhaps marks a transitional point between the symbolism of the *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Childhood*, and the observational impressionism of the Arran works. The huge canvas – 6ft by 10ft – was intended to make a grand statement in contrast to the intimacy and simplicity of *In the Fields* and was again aimed at the Academy audience, possibly with the aim of finding a municipal gallery as purchaser - it was certainly not designed as an NEAC drawing room easel painting. Here Sims depicted a smartly dressed

contemporary family group with an open seascape extending behind them. The title alludes to the narrative content: the adults look on as their children act out their own inevitable independence, the eldest daughter coquettishly engages the attention of a young man, two of the sons stare out to sea and the potential adventures they have in store. The mother (a prematurely aged Agnes) clutches her other daughter and baby son (John) to her skirts, the father pensively smokes a cigarette and observes his daughter's suitor. The figures are all lost in their own thoughts, the atmosphere is of Ibsenesque dislocation, a family divided, an unusual theme for a recently married young man with a baby son and another on the way.²⁶ There are elements that anticipate Sims' Arran impressionism – the use of contemporary dress, especially white muslin frocks with ribbon sashes, the seaside location, the expanse of sky, and the use of Agnes and the young John as models. However here the handling is far less fluid and painterly, the composition more contrived, there is little of the direct brushwork of the later paintings and the lighting is subdued and overcast instead of bright and sunny. When it was exhibited in the Summer Academy of 1901 *The Times* concluded that Sims had 'not yet learned to tell a story,' and the *Ladies Realm* wished that he had been 'less generous in the matter of canvas.'²⁷ The painting was never sold – the artist later re-used pieces of the canvas, presumably loathe to waste it on an unsuccessful experiment.²⁸ Subsequent paintings of his family were on a far smaller scale, aimed perhaps at private buyers and concentrate on exuberantly coloured scenes of breezy sunshine that proved his first real commercial success.²⁹ *The Nest*, 1901, [fig.14] for example, also shown in the Academy, depicts John Sims as a toddler immersed in long grass peering at a bird's nest full of bright blue eggs. The composition is intimate and the figure close to the picture plane. The cerulean blue of the eggs hidden in the grass is echoed in the strip of sky visible

and in the child's dress and this contrasts against the burnt orange tones of the landscape. The complementary colour scheme, subject matter and composition are simple and uncontrived, the interest in this painting lies in Sims' use of paint. The blades of grass were worked swiftly and expressively with the side of a knife, the surface is heavily impasted, luscious and exciting – the artist's application of the pigment (and use of complementary colours) has begun to suggest a looser, more spontaneous and impressionist style.



Fig.14 CS, *The Nest*, 1901, oil on canvas, Private Collection (John Sims)

In the summer of 1901 Sims painted *The Top o' the Hill*, exhibited in the Academy in 1902 [figs.15 and 16].³⁰ His composition, showing Agnes in a white dress silhouetted against the

sky with two boys running down the hill towards the viewer, applied simple contrasts of light and colour in its depiction, primarily, of the effects of wind and sun.³¹ It is in part derived from Monet's *Essai de figure en plein air*, 1886, [fig.17] and Sargent's *A Gust of Wind*, 1887, [fig.18] and was later echoed by Charles Furse's *Diana of the Uplands*, 1903-4 [fig.19]. Painted a year before the family's first trip to Arran, and so presumably in the Essex marshes, *The Top o' the Hill* anticipated both the style and the subjects that followed. For *The Magazine of Art* it was 'as a record of sunlight and breezy atmosphere, as a suggestion of the movement of the wind and the actual gleam of the sun... altogether perfect.'³² This review is strikingly similar to Walter Sickert's much earlier reaction to Steer's *On the Pierhead*. He had 'never seen a canvas ... more like sun and wind ... you feel that sunshine and wind and youth are glorious things, and that life ... is a gift to be grateful for.'³³ Reviews of Sims had in the past remarked upon his understanding of light effects, however the reaction to *The Top o' the Hill* commented for the first time on his depiction of weather as opposed to mere light, 'a masterly note of brilliant sunshine and breezy atmosphere.'³⁴ In the later painting, *Sunshine and Wind*, 1903, which also depicts Agnes and John walking across a breezy heath, the artist has developed his facility for the depiction of weather conditions and highlighted this in his choice of title.³⁵



Fig.15 CS, *The Top o' the Hill*, 1901, oil on canvas, Durban Art Gallery, South Africa



Fig.16 CS, *The Top o' the Hill* (sketch), c1901, red chalk or crayon on paper, archive GB3025/1/4/9

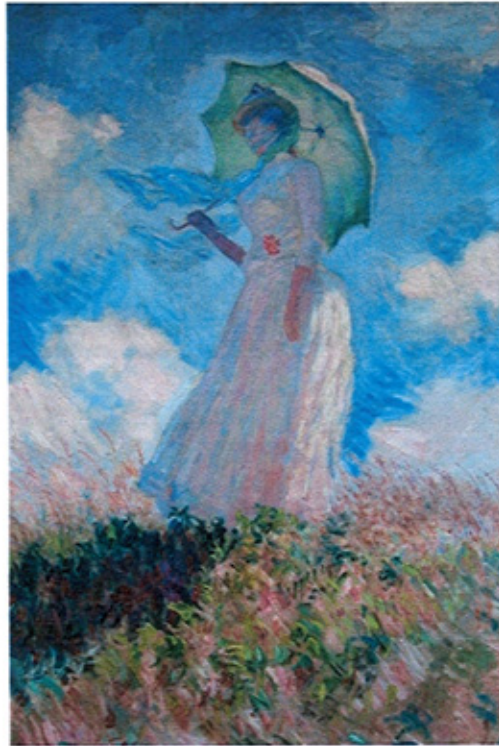


Fig.17 Claude Monet, *Essai de figure en plein air*, 1886, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Fig.18 John Singer Sargent, *A Gust of Wind*, 1887, oil on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.19 Charles Furse, *Diana of the Uplands*, 1903-4, oil on canvas, Tate Britain

Sims' engagement with an impressionist technique is further illustrated by this shift in emphasis. The depiction of weather conditions by Barbizon artists and Impressionists, known as the *effet*, was – by the 1900s – clearly understood to mean the portrayal of 'transitory or ephemeral phenomena which occur in nature,' and Sims would have been familiar with this convention and with French works shown in London galleries such as Monet's *Effet de Neige* (NEAC 1900) and Pissarro's *Place du Théâtre Français, Effet de Pluie* (Durand Ruel, Hanover Gallery 1901).³⁶ He concentrated on the transitory nature of sunlight, changing rapidly depending on the weather. Alan Sims would later recall his father's use of 'moist, silvery light,' and that an unknown critic had observed that to Sims, 'light is the noun; men, women, trees, fountains, the adjectives.'³⁷ This sense that a composition is bound together by the *envelop* of light and atmosphere was widely understood by 1903. However, although Sims had adapted the conventions of the

atmospheric *effet*, his working methods were very different from the French Impressionists as will become clear. The tendency to adopt a range of influences in one image occurs throughout Sims' career, as he recognised himself, later advising his students to 'use all men's discoveries, the most recent models, and make them your own.'³⁸

The Arran paintings are also comparable to those of the Scottish painter William McTaggart, a close friend of Sims' father-in-law.³⁹ His works were produced in the same locality but on the mainland, a few miles away at Machrihanish. Inevitably, the light effects and local colour in the two sets of works are similar.⁴⁰ McTaggart's seascapes and representations of fisherfolk in his native West of Scotland, which dated from the late 1860s and 1870s, were, it has been argued, one of the earliest appearances of Impressionism in Britain, indeed James Caw claimed in his jingoistic 1908 history of Scottish painting that McTaggart had grasped the intricacies of the depiction of light before the French artists who devoted their careers to its study; and in a more natural, intuitive fashion without the need for the scientific analysis espoused in Europe.⁴¹ Like Steer, McTaggart was regarded as a painter of atmosphere, his canvasses pulsating with sunshine and wind, with captured effects of light and weather.⁴² However, the spontaneity and vitality suggested by the works was the result of numerous sketches.⁴³ The production of Sims' Arran paintings was very similar, whilst this series is the most impressionistic foray Sims made, with the appearance of *plein-air* sketches, in fact these are carefully planned compositions and the figures are worked from photographs. The archive holds a collection of the photographs used to produce these paintings, some of which have been squared up by the artist to improve the composition [see **fig.20**]. *By the Arran Sea*, [**fig.21**] reproduced in

The Studio after its appearance in the exhibition of *Independent British Art* at Agnew's in 1906, was clearly worked from the same photograph of Agnes (with minor alterations to her arms) used for *Sunshine and Wind*, [figs. 22, 23 and 24] a repetition spotted by the *Sunday Times*.⁴⁴ From the backlit composition of this photograph it is evident that a portrait of his wife was not Sims' primary concern – rather that Agnes and her white dress were chosen for the opportunities to experiment with the unusual lighting effects that they offered. Presumably Sims took the photographs with the express intent of working up paintings from them (this sheds a different light on a nostalgic collection of family mementoes, and Seabrook's assertion that all family photographs are arcadian constructions). From the studio notebooks and sketches in the archive it is evident that he rarely even ventured outdoors without a sketchpad or better still, colour box and small panels. He was an inveterate scribbler, constantly aware of his surroundings, continually alert to an attractive or unusual light or weather condition. In Sims' own book his advice when making *plein air* sketches is to 'do as much as you can; don't trust to a second chance... Gauge the time available, and make sure of the general effect. Much may be done in ten minutes by keeping to essentials.'⁴⁵ His work is very often a collage of visual stimuli – sunlight on a path here, a tree silhouetted against the sky there, a version of a hastily captured colour sketch, each dredged from an old sketchpad kept for future reference. In this way Sims could 'arrange' nature. This method of working was, of course, not unusual. The Arran works show this clearly - the family snap-shots used to work up the figures, and various hasty seascapes sketched to record an effect of light, demonstrate how seemingly intimate *plein air* studies of the artist's wife and children were in fact exhaustively planned compositions. Sims chose an appropriate style with which to represent these scenes of

family life whilst referring to contemporary visual sources, as if, at the back of his mind whilst watching Agnes and his sons playing on holiday, he was picturing a Sargent, now a Monet, now a Steer, and assembling a magpie-like composition of his own. But whilst Monet and Sargent both depicted lone women silhouetted against the sky, Sims' figure was accompanied by her children.

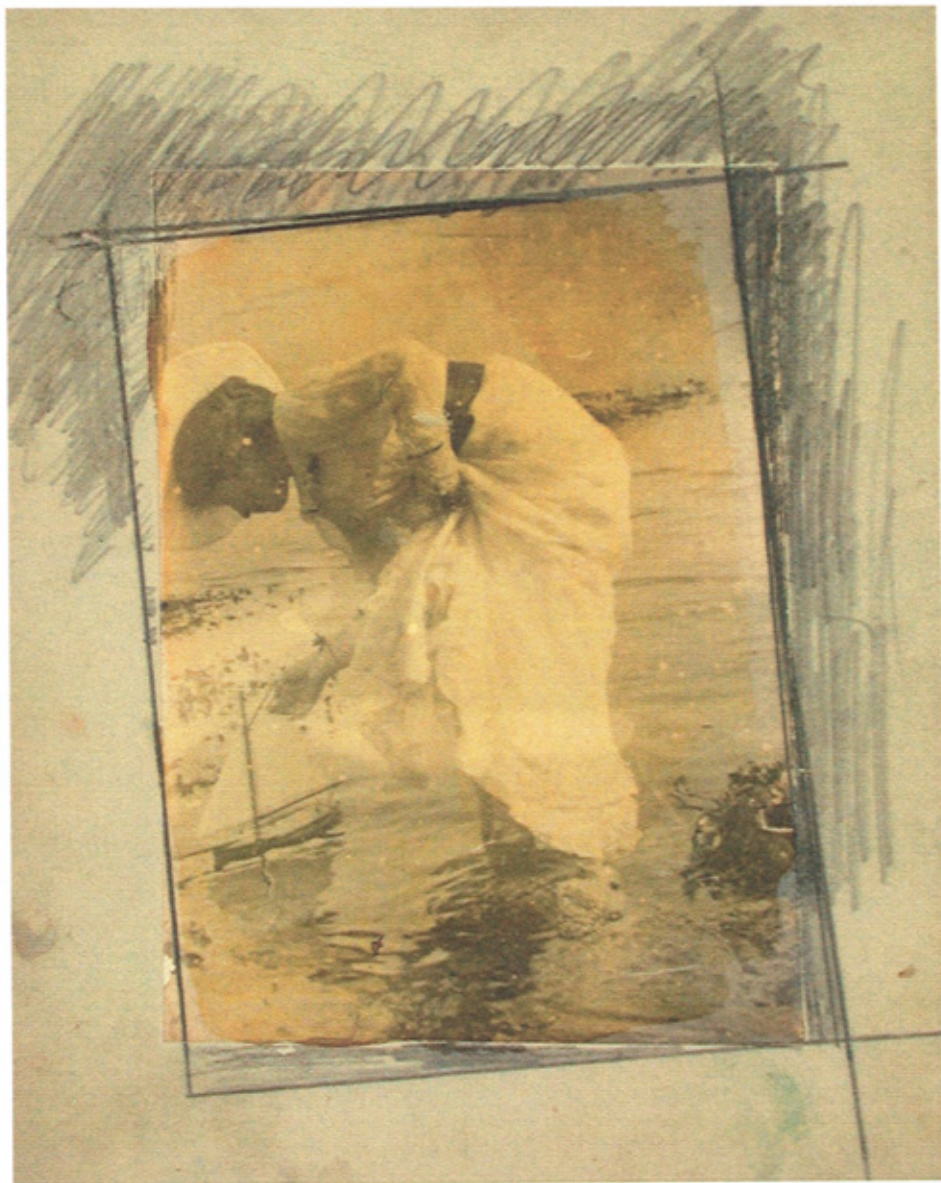


Fig.20 CS, Squared up photograph of Agnes for *Playmates*, c1902, archive GB3025/1/3/14



Fig.21 CS, *By the Arran Sea*, 1905, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.22 CS, *Sunshine and Wind*, 1903, oil on canvas,
Purchased by The Hon. John Collier, present whereabouts unknown



Fig.23 Photograph of Agnes, c1902, archive GB3025/1/3/24



Fig.24 CS, Oil sketch for *By the Arran Sea* (photographed mid-cleaning), c1905, archive GB3025/1/4/14

The impetus for the Arran series clearly comes from a celebration of breezy beaches and sunshine, and a sense of vitality and vibrant infancy. *Playmates*, [figs.25-6] and *Water Babies* [fig.27] both 1902, and shown in the RA in 1903, are also examples of Sims' evident delight not only in portraying his family, but also in experimenting with the effects of sunlight on flesh and water. Reviews recognised his skill at this task, revelling in their 'out-of-doorness... [the] shimmer and glare of the sun,' and the 'astonishing vigour' with which they were painted.⁴⁶ The paintings depict Agnes, John and Alan, playing on the seashore. In *Playmates*, Agnes and John paddle in the sea, playing with a toy boat and seemingly unaware of the viewer; in *Waterbabies*, none of the three figures face the viewer. This is not a grand-scale over-blown statement like *Spreading Their Wings* it is tender, playful observation that seems almost like a collage of private postcards or souvenirs. Inevitably therefore, although seemingly spontaneous and objective, there is also a pervasive nostalgia about the imagery in the paintings and the photographs and sketches in the archive.⁴⁷



Fig.25 CS, Oil sketch for *Playmates* (photographed mid-cleaning), c1902, archive GB3025/1/4/10



Fig.26 CS, *Playmates*, 1902, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.27 CS, *Waterbabies*, 1902, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

Comparison with Augustus John's only slightly later compositions of his own young family highlight Sims' position here. His Arran paintings, such as *By Summer Seas*, c1904, [figs. 28-9] are very far from John's *David and Dorelia in Normandy*, 1907, [fig.30] or *Dorelia and the Children at Martigues*, 1910, which are also small, intimately scaled images of the artist's children and their mother on the seashore, later described as 'gaily coloured mementoes of happy expeditions.'⁴⁸ Like Sims' paintings, they are loosely handled in broad swathes of colour, and use a limited palette. Here the comparisons end, for as has been pointed out, John's motivations were very different, his 'figures occupy an often weather-free environment, where the desire to portray visual fact is subordinate to the desire to express a symbolic ideal.'⁴⁹ The depiction of atmospheric conditions in the Arran works, their very plein-airisme is what tethers them to the actual location, whereas John's elemental idylls, with little sense even of directional lighting, convey a timelessness reminiscent of Puvis des Chavannes - a quality later emulated by Sims.⁵⁰



Fig.28 CS, Oil sketch for *By Summer Seas*, c1904, archive GB3025/3/14



Fig.29 CS, *By Summer Seas*, c1904, oil on canvas,
Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington



Fig.30 Augustus John, *Dorelia and David in Normandy*, 1907, oil on canvas,
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Sims' images of his young family coincide with those contemporary preoccupations with health, youth and vitality.⁵¹ Urban conditions were undoubtedly unhealthy, images of hearty children playing on sunny beaches were therefore symptomatic of the belief that country and more particularly seaside living was infinitely preferable to an urban lifestyle.⁵² Sims' beach scenes, like slightly later Laura Knight's, implicitly reflect these assumptions.⁵³ In Knight's *The Beach*, 1908, [fig.31] contemporary children play in rock pools, their white pinafores and straw sun-bonnets clearly not designed as working clothes, their sunburnt faces and chubby legs demonstrating their health: just as Sims' own rosy-cheeked sons, immaculately dressed in pinafores and sailor-suits, play exuberantly in the fresh sea air. In *Butterflies*, [fig.32] 1903 and *The Kite*, 1905, [fig.33] Sims linked his children more explicitly to this breezy air – the butterflies flutter about on the draughts, just out of reach of the waving nets, in what the *Nottingham Guardian* saw as a 'symbol of one of the gossamer quests of childhood;' the child is pulled along, enveloped by the wind when tethered to the straining kite.⁵⁴ In *The Kite*, Sims' bisected composition emphasises the tension of the kite string, his use of diametrically opposed diagonals – the slope of the sand-dune and the parallel camber of the figures – pulls the scene taut. The kite disappears out of the top of the snapshot, indicative again perhaps of the dreams and aspirations of the small boy who holds its string. The clouds scud past in the bright sky – very different from the still, rather overcast vista of *Spreading Their Wings*.



Fig.31 Dame Laura Knight, *The Beach*, 1908, oil on canvas, The Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne



Fig.32 CS, *Butterflies*, 1903, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.33 CS, *The Kite*, 1905, oil on canvas, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

In 1904, having lived in and around London since his marriage (but for the two years in Essex) Sims and his young family relocated to Étapes, on the coast of northern France. This move followed the precedent set by other British painters who had worked there and at Paris Plage and Dieppe, and was also was an effort to economise – there was still very little commercial interest in his paintings.⁵⁵ That situation changed in 1906 after an extremely successful solo exhibition at the Leicester Galleries where of the 54 paintings and drawings exhibited, 31 were sold.⁵⁶ This time in France and then Bruges was spent preparing work for this show. Whilst no sketches for this series remain, it seems from titles of works shown such as *Washing Day* and *Washerwomen* (both 1904) that Sims was temporarily interested in working, everyday subjects.⁵⁷ However, as Alan Sims has pointed out, the sort of

painting where 'it was essential to wait for an evening when it was pouring with rain, and then go out and look for a man picking up turnips in a field' did not inspire his father.⁵⁸ Rather, he 'leapt gaily from one manner to the next, paying homage now to Turner, now to Tiepolo, now to Frans Hals,' he was, for the *Evening News*, a 'butterfly or a bright bird ever on the flit.'⁵⁹ The same review suggested that far from emphasising the workaday aspects of the 'inevitable Washing Day, beloved of moderns,' Sims had painted it with 'a holiday air,' and that his ambition lay in capturing the play of light on the drying linen rather than in the realistic depiction of labour.⁶⁰ A list of the works exhibited at the Leicester Galleries seems to suggest work of a far more literary or fanciful bent than the reviews suggest. According to Alan Sims, *He shall pass through the sea with affliction*, depicted nothing more than a 'tiresome small boy being encouraged to paddle,' whilst sketches for *Butterflies*, RA 1904 and *The Kite*, RA 1905, were titled *The Moth Catchers* and *They shall be chased as chaff before the wind*.⁶¹ These titles, 'picked out of a book at the last minute,' were indications though of Sims' irreverent inventiveness, in an age when 'an explanatory title could be the making of a popular picture,' he insisted on allusion rather than description.⁶² His foray into plein air impressionism, the depiction of contemporary reality, had, it seems, been short lived.

On their return to England the family settled in Fittleworth, Sussex. It was here that Sims found the surroundings and conditions that would inspire his most imaginative works to date. The next chapter considers paintings created between 1906 and the artist's second solo show in 1910 which appeared to extend lessons derived from the impressionism of the Arran series into more iconographically complex subjects. Sims' preoccupation with youth

and health continued throughout his career, the multiple 'childhoods' explored from *Childhood* - from the ethereal spirits of *The Kingdom of Heaven*, to the sturdy holiday-makers on Arran - developed into cherubic *putti*, baby fauns and lithe classical athletes. His own slight lameness contributed to his penchant for idealized figures, for as his son remarked, 'his quarrel with the apparent world was not for what it did to immortal souls, but for what it did to mortal bodies... his utmost of beauty was physical completion, his utmost of ugliness was physical deformity.'⁶³ This predilection became ever more apparent as his career progressed, especially after the mutilations he witnessed during the Great War. At this stage though his interest in children as unsullied perfect beings coincides with his attempts to create a pre-modern idyll in the Sussex countryside.

¹ Recent publications on and around this subject include those by Andrew Birkin, writing specifically about J. M. Barrie's relationships with children, James Kincaid, the erotic implications of the cult of the child, Lindsay Smith, photography and children, particularly in relation to Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) and Thea Thompson, the sociological aspects of life as an Edwardian child. Nicola Bown's PhD thesis investigates the Victorian predilection for fairies in painting and literature and relates this to a nostalgia for childhood innocence, and Fiona Russell's explores the themes of mourning and loss in the writings for children of J. M. Barrie. See bibliography.

² For a useful study of the social and political efforts to increase the number of children surviving infancy in this period and the moral implications of such attempts see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood' in *History Workshop*, Issue 5, Spring 1978, pp.9-65. W. B. Yeats' *The Stolen Child*, published in 1889, provides perhaps the most famous example of an allegorical literary response to the crisis; here, the death of a child is attributed to its abduction by fairies. Throughout the period, legislative attempts to protect and define children, such as the Children Act of 1889, Education Bills of 1891 and 1901, the Education Act of 1902, the Employment of Children Bill of 1903 and the Children Bill of 1908, contributed to the understanding of childhood as different from adulthood, therefore engendering nostalgia for innocence. This difference in status was intensified by the sudden wealth of cultural output specifically for children - books and periodicals written for children were burgeoning industries at the turn of the century. Children wore clothes that defined them as such rather than miniature adults, had parks to play in, and initiatives such as the Country Holidays Fund encouraged the benefits of fresh air and rural life.

³ The subtext of Langley's painting was *In faith and hope the world will disagree. But all mankind's concern is charity.*

⁴ See W. H. Margetson, *Walter, Son of Arthur Franklin, Esq.* and James Sant, *Hubert, Youngest Son of John Foster, Esq.* for examples of the former, and Elizabeth Forbes' *A Fairy Story*, and John Lavery's *Ann Montgomerie Knox and her Father* of the latter, all RA 1896.

⁵ *Academy Notes*, 1897, p.27. In July 1897 his wife Agnes gave birth to a still-born son. I do not suggest that Agnes' pregnancy was the primary impetus behind Sims' choice of subject, but it has to be more than coincidental that he embarked upon the painting in October 1896, nine months before she gave birth.

⁶ See his later paintings, *Butterflies*, 1903, and *The Kite*, 1905.

⁷ In *Carnation, Lily, Lily Rose*, 1885, Sargent had also exploited the transient quality of this type of light. His insistence on working out of doors limited appropriate conditions to a few minutes each day, for his models and their surroundings soon disappeared into the gloaming.

⁸ In 1905 Frank Bramley completed *Grasmere Rushbearing*, a painting with marked similarities to Sims' *Kingdom of Heaven*. It is interesting to note that the older artist appears to have been influenced by Sims. See Kenneth McConkey, 'Newlyn Naturalist and Edwardian Idealist' in *Frank Bramley RA 1857-1915*, Usher Art Gallery and Lincolnshire County Council, 1999. *For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven* was included in *Famous Paintings of the World*, with an introduction by General Lew Wallace, New York and Liverpool, 1894, p. 169 and was reproduced as a full page illustration in the *Art Journal* of 1897 in A. Lys. Baldry, 'The Collection of George McCulloch Esq.,' pp.69-72.

⁹ *The Times*, May 23rd 1899, p.6. It was compared stylistically with *Childhood* by the same review, 'two years ago this young artist made an impression with a picture in the same key of colour.' In a slightly later painting, *Sleep*, shown in the Academy exhibition of 1895, Bramley too had experimented with applying his habitual naturalist handling to a symbolic subtext. Here the artist linked the child and her natural surroundings – the sleeping child enveloped by overgrown poppies has succumbed to their opiate scent. The 'sleep' of the title is not natural but has been induced, ironically, by nature. It is the presence of the child in a rural setting that allows for the introduction of supernatural or numinous implications. Henry Herbert La Thangue's *The Man with the Scythe*, 1896, also made use of a typically rural scene and a composition close to Bramley's to explore a symbolic theme. Here a sick child is poised on the brink of death whilst sitting in the garden. Her mother has come to tend to her, and discovers that she has died, just as a farm labourer with a scythe passes the garden gate. The connotations and symbolism of the Grim Reaper were clearly understood. Bramley and La Thangue made their point about the end of an era and the loss of innocence by depicting vulnerable, usually female children who appear as isolated individuals engulfed by rampant foliage.

¹⁰ The girl in the far left-hand corner is very like one of Sargent's children in *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885. The pair on the bottom edge of the composition are reminiscent of Hornel's children, peering through foliage, and also bring to mind Tuke's couple in *The Promise*, 1888, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

¹¹ This also possibly alludes to Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*, 1888, in which Spring was banished until the children were admitted to his garden.

¹² This title is a line from Robert Herrick's (1591-1634) *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*, which also explores notions of transient youth and beauty. See Francis T. Palgrave, ed., *The Golden Treasury*, 1875.

¹³ This connection is made explicit by Christie's chosen title which explores notions of disappearing innocence.

¹⁴ This depicts a fairground stall with crowds clustered around it watching a 'fairy' blowing bubbles. The bubbles float off into the air and burst and, as if to reinforce this message of transient life, a farmhand holding a scythe is clearly silhouetted against the lights beyond. *The Studio*, Vol. 11, no. 51, June 1897, p.120.

¹⁵ *The Times*, May 1st 1897, p.16, *Revue de la Jeunesse*, May 1st 1899, page number unknown (SSS).

¹⁶ *Art Journal*, 1897, p.183.

¹⁷ *Magazine of Art*, May – Oct. 1897, p.156.

¹⁸ *Childhood* was described as 'facile' by *The Times* review which is likely to have referred to the subject matter, not the handling. As if to reinforce this analysis, the painting opposite *Childhood* in the Academy exhibition, Arthur H. Buckland's *The Valley of Flowers*, depicting a knight and maiden in medieval dress in a woodland glade, was described unfavourably as 'an unmeaning affair,' by the same review. *The Times*, June 8th 1897, p.11. Wynford Dewhurst's essay on impressionism, published in two parts in *The Studio* of 1903, argued that the French Impressionists had, 'jettisoned the conventional motive, often theatrical, and tabooed the literary element,' suggesting that subject matter of a narrative or symbolic nature was regarded as irrelevant by those espousing impressionist technique. Wynford Dewhurst, op. cit., p.162. By this stage French Impressionist painters had exhibited widely in London and it is certain that Sims had viewed paintings by Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, and Morisot. Although Agnes Sims' diary has been very useful in pinpointing exhibitions he attended, the detail of these occasions did not begin to appear until later entries – from c1908 onwards and particularly after they moved back to London during the war in 1915. For contemporary reaction to the paintings shown in London between 1870 and 1905 see, Kate Flint, ed. *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception*, London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

¹⁹ *Academy Notes*, 1897, p.27. In 1900 it was shown at the Paris Salon where it received a medal and was subsequently purchased by the Luxembourg. There are subtle differences between the version of the painting in the *Royal Academy Illustrated* and a postcard of 1906 printed by the Luxembourg (and now in the Northumbria Sims archive). There are two possible reasons for the discrepancies between the two reproductions: firstly that the artist reworked the painting after its exhibition at the Academy, or that the version in the *RA Illustrated* is a photograph taken in the artist's studio before the painting was finished. Assuming that Sims altered the painting before its exhibition at the Salon, it is interesting to examine the work he produced in the interim period.

²⁰ *In Elysium* was also shown at the Paris Salon in 1901, the year after *Childhood* and is comparable to works such as Anders Zorn's *Red Sand*, 1902, reproduced in Rosenblum, Stevens and Dumas, 1900 – *Art at the Crossroads*, London: Royal Academy Publications, 2000, p.127, where its theme of a nude in idyllic landscape was described as 'anticipa[ting] twentieth century nature cults.' Ibid., p.102.

²¹ Sims later employed an impressionist method of applying paint to more symbolist subjects, see for example *The Little Faun*, and *Night-Piece to Julia*, both discussed later.

²² According to John Sims, the choice of Arran as a holiday destination was likely to have been due to Agnes remembering trips there as a child. Her father, John MacWhirter, painted there often, exhibiting Arran paintings at the RSA in 1858, 1860, 1861, 1865, 1866 and at the RA in 1883, 1892 and 1898. (Lists from W. M. Sinclair, *John MacWhirter, His Life and Times*, Art Annual, 1903, London: Virtue, 1903 via John Sims).

²³ Alan Sims, op. cit., p.103.

²⁴ An *Art Journal* article of 1906 lists Steer's submissions to the NEAC and in 1899 states that one of his entries was called *Children Playing*. This is possibly the same painting as that reproduced by Bruce Laughton and if not, is almost certainly similar as the theme was one that preoccupied Steer. See Bruce Laughton, *Philip Wilson Steer*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. It is possible that *In the Fields* was a deliberate attempt on Sims' part to emulate Steer and in so doing gain acceptance from the NEAC of which Steer was a founder member. Other Sims paintings exhibited at the NEAC were *The Morning's News*, 1898, and *Love and a Student*, 1899.

²⁵ Agnes' diary records their trip to Paris from April 13th – 26th 1900 and that they attended the Exposition on the 17th, 21st and 24th.

²⁶ Alan Sims was born on April 28th 1901. There is an Ibsen-like quality about the tension and fractured relationships similar to William Rothenstein's *A Doll's House*, exhibited in Spring 1903, NEAC.

²⁷ *The Times*, May 24th 1901, p.13. *Ladies Realm*, June 1901, (SSS).

²⁸ The version of Sims' wartime painting *Sacrifice*, at Cartwright Hall, Bradford, is painted on the reverse of the top left-hand corner of *Spreading Their Wings*, the standing female figure and the heads of the two boys are still clearly visible.

²⁹ The Arran paintings attracted positive critical attention on their exhibition in the Academy, but it wasn't until Sims' Leicester Galleries exhibition in 1906 that he began to sell convincingly.

³⁰ Purchased by Durban Art Gallery, South Africa.

³¹ The two child figures must both have been worked from John, as Alan, the second son, was still a baby in summer 1901.

³² *The Magazine of Art*, 1902, p.398.

³³ Walter Sickert, *The Studio*, February 1894, p.223, reproduced in Laughton, op. cit., p.38.

³⁴ See the *Art Journal*, 1897, p.183. *The Studio*, Vol.26, 1902, p.40.

³⁵ Another example is Laura Knight's *Wind and Sun*, c1913.

³⁶ See Michael Clarke, *Corot and the Art of Landscape*, London: British Museum Press, 1991, p.109.

³⁷ Sims, *Picture Making*, op. cit., p.102. Ibid., p.111.

³⁸ Ibid., p.11.

³⁹ For an account of MacWhirter and McTaggart's friendship see Julian Halsby, *Scottish Watercolours 1740-1940*, London: B. T. Batsford, 1986, p.120.

⁴⁰ See in particular Sims' *Sunshine and Wind* 1903 and McTaggart's *Harvest at Broomieknowe* (date unknown).

⁴¹ James L.Caw, *Scottish Painting 1620-1908*, Edinburgh and London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1908, p.250.

⁴² For Alexander Eddington, McTaggart's works have a similarly convincing *plein air* atmosphere: 'There is never a suggestion in his mature work that it is other than a picture completed on the spot... It has no taint of the studio... certainty in the quality of the light and the way in which it is affected by different atmospheric conditions and the objects from which it is reflected.' Alexander Eddington, 'William McTaggart, R.S.A., Painter of Sea and Land,' *The Studio*, Vol.47, no.196, July 1909, p.90.

⁴³ Caw, op. cit., p.251.

⁴⁴ *The Studio*, Vol. 37, No. 155, February 1906., p.26. *Sunday Times*, 1904, date unknown (SSS).

⁴⁵ Sims, op. cit., p.22.

⁴⁶ *Art Journal*, date unknown, 1903 (SSS).

⁴⁷ Especially retrospectively, given that we know about John's early death. For an interesting discussion about the role of the souvenir or memento see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

⁴⁸ Denys Sutton, 'The Significance of Augustus John,' *Country Life*, 25 March 1954, p.866. As reproduced in Ysanne Holt, 'Augustus John: Anti-Tourism and the Landscape, Health and Distinction,' *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 4, no.1, 2003, p.53.

⁴⁹ Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, op. cit., p.55.

⁵⁰ Sims would later refer to Puvis' figure-in-landscape compositions, these will be investigated in Chapter Three.

⁵¹ As is now recognised, the turn of the century saw an increased preoccupation with health and vigour in an effort to address fears of an increasingly degenerate population. For example, in 1899, a third of all volunteers to fight in the Boer War were rejected as physically or mentally unfit, the birth rate within the educated classes was on the decline and of the children that were born in England and Wales, some 16% died before their first birthday. See Anna Davin, op. cit., pp.10-15.

⁵² In 1910, for example, this belief underscored an advertising campaign by the OXO firm whose caption underneath an image of a child playing on a beach was, 'A town child fed on OXO is as healthy and sturdy as a seaside child.' Published in *The Graphic*, November 26th 1910. Havelock Ellis, writing in 1908, discussed the differences between rural and urban societies more generally, that in 'States that are fundamentally agricultural the production of children occurs almost automatically... there is always food for another mouth... all this is altered when agricultural life gives place to industrial life... children... either die with greater rapidity... or else grow up stunted, defective, [or] nervously unstable.' Havelock Ellis, 'The Care of the Unborn' in *The New Age*, April 11th 1908, Vol. 2, no.16, p.469. The Spanish painter often compared with Sargent, Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, recorded a scene of damaged urban children in his *A Sad Inheritance* of 1899. Far from healthy happy children playing on the beach, the artist has chosen to represent crippled syphilitic children, victims of their parents' sexual degeneracy, taking to the sea as if to a restorative spa. It is possible that Sims saw this painting in the Paris Exhibition, 1900.

⁵³ For a study of how the sea-side became a fashionable site of leisure, see J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday: A Social History*, first published in 1947 by Faber and Faber, this ed. 1976, Harvester Press Ltd, and John K. Walton, 'The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays in Victorian England,' *Economic History Review*, 34, 1981, pp.249-265.

⁵⁴ *Nottingham Guardian*, date unknown 1906, (SSS).

⁵⁵ Steer worked in Étaples and Boulogne in the 1880s whilst Sickert based himself along the coast at Dieppe between 1898 and 1905.

⁵⁶ The Leicester Galleries, Leicester Square, London, were run by Brown and Phillips and exhibited the work of contemporary artists in a programme of month-long shows. For example, between 1903 and 1907, artists showing there included E. A. Abbey, Elizabeth Forbes, John Lavery, D. Y. Cameron, Arthur Rackham, Charles Conder, Mark Fisher, Charles Shannon and, of course, Sims. For a list of the works exhibited by Sims in 1906 and 1910 see Appendix B.

⁵⁷ *Washing Day* was one of the works sold at the Leicester Galleries in 1906, see Appendix B.

⁵⁸ Sims, op. cit., p.103.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.103. *Evening News*, March 3rd 1906, (page unknown – SSS).

⁶⁰ *Evening News*, March 7th 1906. (page unknown SSS). This description equates perhaps to Sorolla's large canvas, *Sewing the Sail*, of 1896, in which the white canvas of the sail, dappled with sunlight, is the main focal point of the composition. It is possible that Sims saw this painting in the Paris Exhibition, 1900.

⁶¹ Alan Sims, in Sims, op. cit., p.104.

⁶² Ibid., p.104.

⁶³ Ibid., p.93.

Chapter Two: 'The Ariel of the Academy'

The Leicester Galleries show in 1906 was a critical and financial success. Sims was described as 'one of the most balanced of our younger moderns,' and a 'vivacious painter, distinctly one of the modern school,' and was for the first time financially stable.¹ The family settled in the countryside of West Sussex, where they would stay until the war years.² During this period the surrounding countryside began to have a clear impact on his work. For Harold Speed, this was Sims' happiest time, 'in the beautiful county of Sussex he was free to indulge his fancy unrestrained.'³ In diary entries Sims too acknowledged the significance of the landscape, 'I can find what I want here in the woods and commons... [they] will set my fancy free.'⁴ Both artists use the term 'fancy' rather than imagination and, for Speed, this distinction characterised much of Sims' work, describing his *metier* as led by 'fancy [which is] the imagination in holiday mood.'⁵ This chapter will examine the paintings produced between 1906 and 1910 when he showed at the Leicester Galleries again. Sims exhibited consistently during this period, at the RA and the RWS amongst others, and, beginning to expand on the reputation he had developed, in 1908 he was elected an ARA at the unusually young age of thirty-four.

The works discussed in this chapter can be divided into three categories: the monumental, decorative, public examples of what I term Edwardian Classicism, versions of the popular contemporary theme of the processional - *An Island Festival* and *The Fountain*; the smaller, intimate imaginings, *The Little Faun* and *A Night Piece to Julia*; and the watercolour *fêtes galantes* reminiscent of Watteau and Fragonard, like for example *The Swing*, and *Tumble, Froth and Fun*.⁶ The three groupings identified share

the desire to picture alternatives to contemporary reality but with interesting allusions to that reality in each case. The aim is to consider the continuing preoccupations within such apparently disparate stylistic categories, and to pinpoint the key events and influences that might account for Sims' varied responses.

Festivals and ritual gatherings were popular subjects in late Victorian and Edwardian painting and were treated in various ways by a variety of individuals, from naturalistic reporting of actual events, to historical pageants, to classical and mythological reconstructions. In *An Island Festival*, 1907, [fig.34] Sims chose to represent an updated Classical poesie.⁷ The spontaneous impressionism developed in his Arran and Essex paintings had, by 1905, lost its appeal – breezy autobiographical scenes did not satisfy Sims' inventive nature for long, although their fluid, painterly techniques were vital to this next stage of his career. His children on the seashore, or in the fields, 'naked and rosy, abounding in health, chirruping like birds,' were transformed into youthful Greek nudes suggesting an ancient culture free from contemporary anxieties over bodily weakness and degeneracy, a 'golden age when people had as few cares as clothes.'⁸ Sims' festival suggests a pagan celebration (a preoccupation explored more overtly in later paintings before his interest in Christian ritual developed) here coinciding with the concerns of an increasingly secular, materialistic and imperialist society. Whilst not explicitly derived from Greco-Roman prototypes the revellers are pale-skinned and athletic. The majority are naked and those clothed are swathed in toga-like draperies which emphasise the classical allusions. The sea is visible in the background, and, in conjunction with the wheeling seagulls, it is this that describes the island of the title. The overflowing haywain and the baskets on the heads of the background figures, suggest a harvest celebration, the culmination of labour, of coming home from the

fields.⁹ The atmosphere is one of *joie de vivre*, praise for the harvest and for youth and health.



Fig.34 CS, *An Island Festival*, 1907, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

The work is not a recognizable allegory of life from birth to death as might be expected given the themes of ripeness and maturity associated with the harvest motif, as in Mary Young Hunter's *Song of the Harvest*, 1898, [fig.35] a similar processional composition. Sims' figures are all in their youthful prime or young children. Thomas C. Gotch's *Pageant of Childhood*, 1899, [fig.36] is also comparable, it adopted the pseudo-medieval idiom he favoured and, like Young Hunter, presented a procession as a frozen frieze. Sims, however, 8 years later, took a historical theme and treated it in an exuberantly modern way.¹⁰ He might be seen to have updated the static freeze-frame effect of Gotch and Young Hunter's compositions and, more particularly, paintings of

the 'Victorian Parnassus' by figures such as Alma Tadema, Leighton, Albert Moore and G. F. Watts.¹¹



Fig.35 Mary Young Hunter, *Song of the Harvest*, c1898, whereabouts unknown



Fig.36 Thomas Cooper Gotch, *A Pageant of Childhood*, 1899, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

Sims commented on Watts and Leighton disparagingly in 1905, for they 'let Greek sculpture get between them and nature... looked for Greek forms in the model, and put

them there when they couldn't find them,' they 'learned a great deal about Greek Art and served it up aptly but it is less interesting than the original.'¹² His own ambition was clearly different from their rather monotonous repetitions of classical themes. Where Alma Tadema impressed his audience with a mass of archaeological detail, painstakingly transcribed, Sims was addressing what he saw as the classical spirit, not the historical facts of a lost civilization.¹³ For the critic of the *Daily Mail* in 1908, he lived 'in the world of Greek mythology' but instead of 'accepting the denizens of that world in the form in which they have been handed down to us,' he went to the 'fountain-head,' and formed his own personal interpretation - one seemingly self-consciously Edwardian, not Victorian, and recognised as 'curiously original.'¹⁴ Sims introduced an air of spontaneity, an energy and, most importantly, an implied modernity via the fluidity of Impressionist technique. The depiction of weather, the breezy sunshine of his Arran canvasses, is transformed. Paddling children have grown into young muscular harvesters who delight in their own nakedness. The harvest waggon becomes a triumphal car. Intimacy and innocence is supplanted by the public parading of sensuality, a sense recognised by *The World* as 'overwhelmingly alive.'¹⁵

An Island Festival was shown as part of Imre Kiralfy's 1909 exhibition at White City, the *Imperial International Exhibition*. Sims' studio diary also records that it was included in the exhibition of the *Festival of Empire* at Sydenham's Crystal Palace originally planned for May 1910.¹⁶ For Paul Greenhalgh, the Fine Art pavilions at these extravagant exhibitions were crucial, both to add gravitas to the more frivolous entertainments on offer and to counterbalance the displays of science and technology, art was 'the non-functional aspect of human endeavour every nation had to be seen to participate in to avoid the charge of philistinism.'¹⁷ That Sims' *Island Festival* was

included in the selections demonstrates that by 1909 his work was deemed appropriate to represent his country.¹⁸ Finally purchased in 1916 by the National Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, his celebratory image indicative of Edwardian stability and Imperialist confidence has been described as ‘just the sort of picture to be dispatched to the colonies.’¹⁹

There are interesting comparisons to be made between *An Island Festival*, Alma Tadema’s *A Dedication to Bacchus* of 1889 [fig.37] and Leighton’s *Daphnephoria* of 1874-6 [fig.38]. Alma Tadema had been chosen, with Millais, Orchardson and Burne-Jones, to exhibit in the Franco-British exhibition of 1908, and, according to Greenhalgh, had been ‘put forward as the greatest [artist] in Europe.’²⁰ Leighton’s *Daphnephoria* was shown as part of his retrospective at Burlington House in January 1897. These two paintings are both examples of High Victorian Classicism, they depict scenes of revelry in classical idylls.²¹ One of the most significant aspects that they share, unlike the Sims, is that their festivities are structured and ordered. In both instances the perspective and therefore sense of space is enhanced by the artists’ inclusion of the paving slabs – the receding squares emphasising the distance between the viewer and the scene. Compositionally, Alma Tadema and Leighton separate their protagonists from the viewer, they are set well behind the picture plane, the viewer is invited to witness their celebrations from a respectful distance. There is a clear hierarchy in both of these works. Figures are divided into performers and spectators. With Leighton this is achieved by containing the performance on the central paved area, in Alma Tadema there are two distinct groupings, the performers are on ground level whilst the spectators are raised on the step to the right-hand side of the composition. Distancing in both cases indicates that the viewer is a spectator rather than participant. Sims rejects these

distinctions – everyone joins in, there are no passive spectators.²² Foreground figures are pressed against the picture plane; no ground is included, and the viewer is in the thick of the action. The perspective is slightly askew, so whilst we look up as if from the orchestra pit at the woman and child in the foreground, we look down from the ‘Gods’ upon the mother and child in the haywain.²³ This adds to the sense of immediacy and dynamism in direct contrast to the staid processions of Leighton and Alma Tadema. Sims deliberately portrayed a more riotous ‘living’ *mise-en-scène*, as if, through the dynamic tumbling bodies, to emphasise the instantaneity of the scene. The festival, he suggests, is taking place in a particular location right now. The abandon of the dancing figures implies the rhythm of natural flowing movement - for *The Nation*, his figures were ‘surging rather than moving across the canvas.’²⁴ The scale of the work further enhances this immediacy – its monumental size means that the foreground figures are read as lifesize. Scale was crucial to Sims here and may indicate that he was looking for a mural commission, rather than simply producing an Academy painting.²⁵ In 1906, the year he embarked on *An Island Festival*, the Royal Exchange mural programme committee resumed, and in 1907-8 recommenced commissioning artists after a hiatus at the turn of the century.²⁶ *An Island Festival* was perhaps an advertisement of his talents. A surviving (and undated) design for a rejected Royal Exchange mural in the archive is proof that Sims was interested in a commission and submitted a cartoon.²⁷



Fig.37 Lawrence Alma Tadema, *A Dedication to Bacchus*, 1889, oil on canvas, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Fig.38 Alfred Lord Leighton, *The Daphnephoria*, c1874, oil on canvas, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight



Fig.39 Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1522-3, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London



Fig.40 CS, *Bacchus and Ariadne* (sketch), c1906, archive GB3025/1/4/21

Sims had no compunctions about borrowing imagery from past artists for his paintings and he favourably described Raphael, the ‘greatest all-round painter who ever lived’ as a ‘confirmed borrower.’²⁸ His own vibrant festival is clearly influenced by Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1522-23, [fig.39] bought by the National Gallery in 1826. We know from reviews of his 1906 exhibition and from sketches in the archive [fig.40] that Sims had also previously shown a painting also called *Bacchus and Ariadne*.²⁹ There are multiple references to Titian’s painting in *An Island Festival* - the first, and most obvious, is in the right-to-left direction of the procession. The figures are all captured in stages of dynamic movement, their unstable poses suggesting continuing motion. The carmine drapery of Titian’s *Bacchus*, silhouetted against the sky, has been purloined by Sims’ central figure who waves his red cloak in the air. The suspended pose of the *Bacchus* leaping from his chariot becomes the foreground woman twisted awkwardly against the picture plane in her exuberant dance. The child behind her, mirroring her pose, relates to Titian’s cymbal-playing nymph. Perhaps the most subtle and witty of Sims’ quotations is the foreground child riding a goat. Alan Sims apparently posed for this figure, sitting on a suitcase whilst his mother read *Treasure Island* to him.³⁰ He occupies the same position as Titian’s young satyr. Sims has divided the mythical creature into its two elements, boy and goat, and re-presented them in his homage. Earlier sketches held in the archive include two leopards in the foreground in place of the goat, Titian’s chariot is reinterpreted as a large barrel mounted on cartwheels, and a nude youth in the left-hand corner apes the twisting pose of Titian’s Ariadne. In *An Island Festival* Sims has lost these more explicit references and only the sketches witness the clear original inspiration. Despite all of the similarities, Titian was representing the specific moment when Ariadne, having lost Theseus, submits to Bacchus. Sims has no such story. His meaning comes from elsewhere. Critics debated

the validity of a work wherein an indistinct setting and lack of narrative was swept away by a sense of exuberance that ‘catches your breath like a whirlwind, and gives you no time to ponder over the meaning of it all.’³¹ *An Island Festival* was, for the *Birmingham Post*, ‘a triumphant success,’ for *The Nation*, ‘a lyric poem of passionate, though irregular, cadences,’ and for the *Daily News*, ‘the most interesting failure of the year, if failure it be.’³² The painting provoked controversy and much critical interest – how could such an unresolved image of jumbled figures, ‘in design a thing of tatters,’ be classed as an Academic painting?³³ In Stephen Sims’ scrapbook some 83 press cuttings refer to *An Island Festival*. They range in tone from utter incomprehension to total delight, but most agree that despite compositional incongruities, the emotional content of the canvas was clear, for the *Daily Mail*, the painting spoke of ‘the intoxication of pure joy in nature on a delicious day in a world that knows not of care or death.’³⁴ The most coherent narrative that could be applied to *An Island Festival*, was of some sort of bacchanal, the ‘roysterers... drunk with happiness rather than with wine,’ and in these terms an obvious contemporary comparison would be Frank Brangwyn’s *Wine*, shown slightly later in the Academy of 1910.³⁵ *The Art Journal* noticed that Brangwyn’s Bacchus was a ‘type of to-day,’ his pale torso contrasting with his sunburnt arms.³⁶ The painting depicted a ‘pagan peasant... infected with the odour of fragrant grapes and the heathenish joys of wassail.’³⁷ For Walter Shaw Sparrow, writing on Brangwyn in 1910, this was a ‘fine picture, alive with a lusty zest’ that ‘killed every neighbour in a big room.’³⁸ But, if Brangwyn’s colours were of ‘rubies and emeralds and sapphires,’ Sims’ were ‘pearls and opals and moonstones... the colour of nature in her most tender and spring-like moods,’ subtle, evocative and, for the *Daily Mail*, enabling him to ‘communicate his dreams to the world and to make us share in their delight.’³⁹

There are other contemporary references worth considering, albeit more explicitly tied to specific narratives. Gotch and Mary Young Hunter, for example, both made use of historical costumes that allude to a Shakespearian, pastoral pageant of England. Edwin Austin Abbey's *Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the Lady Anne*, 'Picture of the Year' at the 1896 Academy, had set the tone. For *The Times* this was, 'tapestry-like' with a 'heraldic effect,' but also had a 'weird originality' that was 'entirely modern.'⁴⁰ Abbey's procession of costumed Shakespearian characters has been described recently as having 'opened up to the imagination of the masses the grand spectacle of the national past,' by treating the imaginative subject with a credibly naturalistic handling.⁴¹ Pageantry, the outdoor re-enactment of national historical events by costumed volunteers, also grew as a phenomenon during the early years of the twentieth century, coinciding with the popularity of paintings depicting historical figures in antique costumes.⁴² This popular spectacle was perhaps, like the innovations in theatrical productions and the picturing of Merrie England on the walls of the Academy, another symptom of distaste for the mundanity of everyday life. *The Times* review of the 1909 *English Church Pageant*, in which the history of Christianity in England was re-enacted by a cast of 4,200, revealed the degree to which ideals of both national identity and the rural idyll were central to the concept of pageantry with its observation that, 'the stage of the pageant is a large green meadow, dotted here and there with a dozen fine English trees, oak and elm and chestnut and lime.'⁴³ Sims was not directly involved in displays of pageantry until the celebration of the 800th anniversary celebrations of the founding of St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1923, but aspects of his painting – particularly the depiction of historical/mythical figures in a rural setting coincide with contemporary preoccupations throughout his career.

Another approach to the theme of ceremonial processions had emerged in the work of Stanhope Forbes and Frank Bramley. As we have seen, both artists favoured a naturalistic style, previously depicting the Cornish community of Newlyn and its picturesque inhabitants at work, and in the early years of the century both produced celebratory images of parading villagers. Forbes' *Gala Day at Newlyn*, 1907, [fig.41] depicts the fisherfolk he had often painted before in scenes of labour and hardship, now in their Sunday best and out in the sunshine to celebrate the Newlyn Town Gala.⁴⁴ Bramley's *Grasmere Rushbearing*, 1905, [fig.42] was a similar portrayal of a Lake District village festival.⁴⁵ Here, traditionally, the village children processed with garlands of flowers and rushes through the streets to the church where the floor of the nave was strewn with the rushes. The village church is in the background and, like Forbes' view of the Newlyn harbour wall, locates the action in a very specific environment. Another example, shown in the Academy of 1906, was W. H. Y. Titcomb's *The Church in Cornwall: Rogation Day Procession* [fig.43] in which fishermen and choirboys process along the seafront. The sea and fishing boats are clearly visible in the background, and it is for these that they praise God.⁴⁶ But these paintings, however celebratory, were still documentary records of very particular and parochial scenes and unlike the decorative aesthetic of Gotch and Young Hunter with their imaginary, allegorical tableaux.⁴⁷ By contrast Sims' *Island Festival* is not specific or localised, there are no clear contemporary allusions to suggest a record of an actual event. However, his spontaneous handling of paint and use of directional sunlight rejects the rather sterile airless atmosphere of the purely decorative tableaux. Neither documentary nor allegory but somehow both, Sims' festival is simultaneously distant and exotic, dynamic and vibrantly realistic.



Fig.41 Stanhope Alexander Forbes, *Gala Day at Newlyn*, 1907, oil on canvas
Gray Art Gallery and Museum, Hartlepool



Fig.42 Frank Bramley, *Grasmere Rushbearing*, 1905, oil on canvas, National Trust



Fig.43 W. H. Y. Titcomb, *The Church in Cornwall: Rogation Day Procession*, RA 1906, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.44 William Orpen, *Improvisation on a Barrel Organ*, 1900, oil on canvas, National Museums on Merseyside, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

An Island Festival merged allegory and contemporaneity into a celebratory bacchanal, in the same way that Brangwyn's *Wine* suggested a scene of rustic revelry far removed from urban reality, the antidote to everyday life. A very different painting, although ostensibly based on the same theme and – like Sims' painting – similarly located between documentary and allegory, was William Orpen's *Improvisation on a Barrel Organ*, 1902 [fig.44]. Orpen depicted his artist friends (including Augustus John) at a riotous orgiastic bacchanal deep within the countryside. This painting has been interpreted by Kenneth McConkey as a challenge (or at least a question) to the rustic naturalist 'rick-building trope' of established artists such as George Clausen.⁴⁸ Unlike Sims' breezy sunshine, Orpen's revels take place by night, which automatically suggests a darker and less innocent *kermesse*. The implications of drunkenness, promiscuity and paganism verging on witch-craft threaten to topple the popular urban view of a prelapsarian rural idyll. The horns of the foreground oxen silhouetted against the distant landscape are reminiscent of Goya's *The Great He-Goat or Witches' Sabbath*, 1821-23; as McConkey suggests, the celebrations are savage and ritualistic – a nightmare rather than a vision, *walpurgisnacht* as opposed to May Day.⁴⁹ However different the atmosphere, Orpen's *Barrel Organ* is another example of the tendency towards depicting country-folk engaged in ritual and tradition. Sims' hay-rick is not, like Clausen's, an emblem of picturesque labour, nor is it a challenge to that tradition like Orpen's – it is little more than a compositional device, but it alerts the viewer to the tradition which he alludes to and builds upon.⁵⁰

After *An Island Festival* had been shown in the Royal Academy in 1907, a cartoon was published in *Punch* and a copy is in Sims' scrapbook [fig.45].⁵¹ Captioned '*An Island Festival; or, The Expulsion of Living Statuary from Britain, AD 1907,*' it illustrates

Sims' composition, with the inclusion of a policeman forcibly ejecting one of the company, and the small boy on the right selling newspapers with the headline 'Living Statuary – Home Secretary's Decision – Special.' This relates to a contemporary controversy. In 1907 *The Times* reported that the Bishop of London and the National Vigilance Committee had deemed the fashionable music hall entertainment known as 'Living Statuary' immoral and to be banned.⁵² In Living Statuary actors in close-fitting body suits posed as famous statues and extended the late Victorian taste for 'Pygmalion' fantasies to a logical if risqué conclusion.⁵³ It was preceded by *poses plastiques* and *tableaux vivantes*, whereby actors adopted the poses and groupings from famous paintings.⁵⁴ But whilst participants in these were usually in costume, the living statues appeared to be naked. The protests were effective, with an amendment being passed to regulate the performances.⁵⁵ Much of the argument centred around the sale of postcards picturing scenes from these performances. One of the more famous groups engaged in this entertainment was *The Seldoms* who appeared at the London Pavilion [fig. 46]. Significantly, in *The Times* report a Mr. H. J. Greenwood, chairman of the Theatre Committee claimed there was nothing 'demoralizing' or indecent about the exhibitions as long as the figures involved were motionless, and that the subjects were 'of a classical nature.'⁵⁶ All of this signifies the deference towards classical subjects in the imperialist culture of the period when classicism was a reinforcement of imperial ideals, and when nudity or semi-nudity was acceptable if garbed in popular mythology. For Sims, the argument offered a new opportunity to paint nudes in sunshine and attracted attention and acclaim for his work by presenting a topical theme in a wholly new way.

ROYAL ACADEMY PICTURES—RE-VARNISHED.



Mr. Max Beerbohm pays a morning call on Mrs. Chepe-Chintz. WALTER H. RUSSELL.



The New Sikh Coiffure. Why not carry it a little further after studying No. 390? G. A. STOREY, A.R.A.



Lord Ant-hill, G.C.S.I. ALBERT H. COLLINGS.



An Island Festival; or, The Expulsion of Living Statuary from Britain, A.D. 1907. C. SIMS.



"Halo, Halo, Halo! A different 'Maid' again!" JESSIE MACGREGOR.



An Acute Case of Wistaria; or, A Neat Thing in Summer Trousers. DAVID MCCRAY, R.A.



An Anatomical Study. The Spiral Column. JOHN S. SARGENT, R.A.

Fig.45 Page from Punch, *Royal Academy Pictures Re-Varnished*, 1907, scrapbook in archive

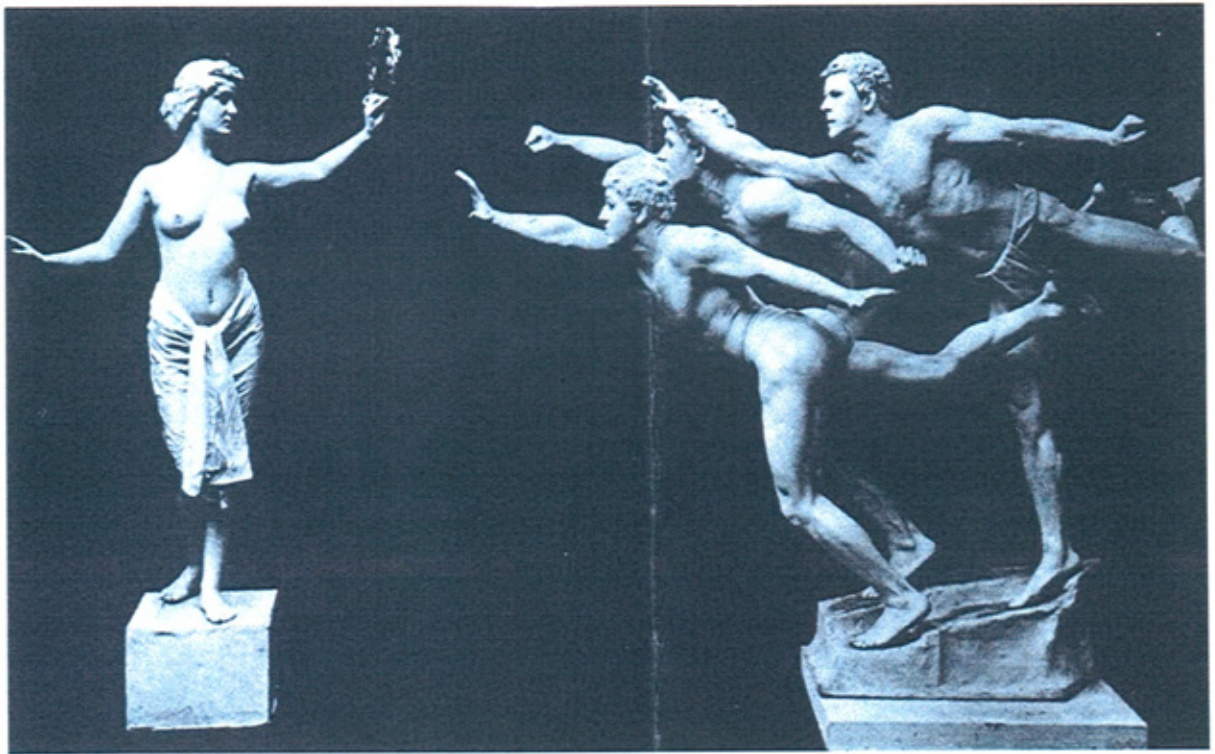


Fig.46 Postcard, *The Seldoms*, c1905, Richard Mangan; Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection, London

The living statuary controversy was widely publicized in the popular press and we know Sims was aware of the story and, presumably, amused by *Punch's* interpretation of his painting.⁵⁷ Perhaps he deliberately extended this interpretation with his next work. Taking into account his student *revue* antics, presenting the Royal Academy with a barely masked depiction of a controversial form of popular entertainment must have been an irresistible opportunity, resulting in 1908 with *The Fountain* [fig.47]. Sims seems to have emphasised associations with the debate to the extent that reviewers assumed that his nude figures *were* statues from around the base of the fountain:

Suddenly, like Frankenstein, life has vitalized them... they are beings of flesh and blood... The prancing horses... are imbued with active life, and there is a medley of movement.⁵⁸

The Fountain is less riotous a composition than *An Island Festival*. Dynamism is provided by the tumbling water rather than the figures, and a more serene atmosphere is evoked. The fountain of the title takes the place of the ionic columns in the previous

work, in both images the protagonists are contained by the structure on the left. In *The Fountain* the artist has extended the vista, the scale of the figures has been reduced in relation to the expanse of sky. If we accept that Sims intended these figures to be read as life-size, then the fountain itself is of monumental proportions, and it is feasible that figures of this scale would have fitted around the base as sculptures.⁵⁹ Sims and his wife had travelled around Italy in May 1907, spending time in Rome, Florence, Pisa and Venice. Although there is no direct reference in the diaries to the famous Trevi fountain in Rome [fig.48] it is likely that they did see it, and Sims' *Fountain* contains clear allusions to similar statuary, particularly in the rearing horses to the right.⁶⁰



Fig.47 CS, *The Fountain*, 1907, oil on canvas, Tate Britain



Fig.48 Trevi Fountain, Rome

The composition developed from several sketches, the painting had apparently ‘grown’ of its own accord from disparate ideas around the theme of early morning light.⁶¹ Sims was no longer relying on the facts that nature presented to him, his compositions were developing independently of observational study. In the surviving oil study for *The Fountain*, [fig.49] held in the archive, we can see how the seemingly meaningless marks and blobs of paint have transformed into the components of the finished work – Sims was led to the conclusion by the paint itself. The medium became more than a vehicle, it inspired the composition itself. In this process we witness the development of the artist’s use of impressionist technique, by adopting its fluid spontaneity he has freed himself from earlier constraints and literally begins to use the paint in order to visualize the image he searches for. An article in *The World* of 1908 described Sims’ technique of making multiple sketches for one painting – never altering a previous idea but making a whole new sketch as his inspiration progressed.⁶² The writer mentions that it was rare for Sims to create a finished painting within eighteen months of making initial studies, and many sketches surviving in the archive would support this. The article includes

photographs of Sims painting in his garden [see figs. 50 and 51], formally attired in a three-piece suit and tie, and with Agnes reading in the background.⁶³ One of the photographs shows him painting *The Fountain*. The work appears to be almost complete, and the artist is captured adding detail to the central standing figure. This suggests the usual method of building up layers of paint – from indistinct swathes of colour and tone to the finishing touches of fine detail. *The Fountain* was worked wholly in oil paint, but Sims was already beginning to experiment with tempera and would develop a technique of his own invention which involved building the under-painting in the egg-based medium and finishing with touches of oil to heighten specific areas of interest.



Fig.49 CS, Oil study for *The Fountain* (photographed during cleaning), c1907, archive GB3025/3/33



Figs.50-1 Photographs of Sims, *The World*, May 20th 1908, pp.906-7, scrapbook in archive

The fountain has long been a potent cultural source in Western art, from Cranach's 1546 *Fountain of Youth*, to Duchamp's notorious version of 1917.⁶⁴ The life-giving qualities of the waters of a fountain were well established in art and literature by the time Sims painted his version. Baudelaire had written at length about its symbolism, describing a painting in the 1845 Salon (William Haussollier's *Fountain of Life*) where figures nearest to the youth-giving waters are in the process of being rejuvenated, 'vaporously, outrageously white; they are just beginning to re-emerge, so to speak, into life.'⁶⁵ They are 'almost-living statues' like Sims' figures.⁶⁶ In *The Fountain* the pellucid atmospheric lighting reveals an enchanted time of day. To reinforce this ephemeral vision of a specific moment, Sims made use of the prismatic effect of sunlight shining through the water. The light is split and forms a rainbow which is, in turn, reflected onto the flesh of the figures giving an iridescence and luminosity to their outlines. Sims subsequently used the word 'prismatic' in his studio notes. It was an effect that he aimed to achieve in his use of colour. He uses it most explicitly here, actually painting a rainbow, rather than just using colour in a vibrant fashion.⁶⁷ The inclusion of a rainbow not only suggests the impermanence of the light effect, but also infers that the figures themselves appear fleetingly and will disappear in an instant. This air of transience, of visions on the edge of reality caught out of the corner of the eye, permeates much of Sims' art - along with a sense of the numinous, of something beneath the surface of material life. One contemporary comparison to his *Fountain* is, perhaps, Charles W. Wyllie's *The Nymphs' Pool*, [fig.52] shown in the Academy in 1906. Wyllie's composition does not allude to Classical statuary nor does it include an actual fountain – his semi-clad nymphs dance into a rather ordinary looking pond, disrobing as they go. The real comparison is in the translucent handling of the figures – both artists suggest that their visions are transitory, the figures are figments of the imagination briefly made

flesh. The *Yorkshire Observer* concisely noted, quite acutely, this sense of capturing an instant, claiming that Sims' painting had 'neither beginning nor end, but only a middle.'⁶⁸ The reviewer of *Black and White* was yet more enthusiastic, observing that he could 'dream poetic fantasies and paint them in liquid silver' with a 'triumph of imagination' that proved 'a marvellous refreshment after Academic futilities of cobwebs and cardboard.'⁶⁹ For *The Observer*, *The Fountain* was both 'splendidly irresponsible, like a delicious dream of Arcadia [and]... far more convincing than the solidly-modelled sculpturesque forms of the mythological nudes of academic art... it is all so vividly imagined, that it has the truth of a rapidly recorded impression painted direct from nature.'⁷⁰ Here, as in *An Island Festival*, Sims' amalgamation of naturalist handling and imaginative subject created a credible glimpse of another world.



Fig.52 Charles W. Wyllie, *The Nymphs' Pool*, RA 1906, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

Whilst producing these monumental exhibition pieces Sims was also experimenting with more intimate portrayals of imaginary figures in natural surroundings. One review

of his first Leicester Galleries exhibition described the experience as walking through ‘pictures amongst which one has adventures.’⁷¹ These adventures had, with *The Fountain*, begun to have a distinctly eighteenth century flavour – the statuary and tumbling water reminiscent of Watteau’s glades and grottoes. Sims’ particular approach began to take the form of pagan celebration, of humans united with mythical beings in the joyous worship of life and nature. The youthful Midsummer Night’s festivities led by Sims in his student days and recalled by his friend and critic P. G. Konody now appeared in his paintings. Konody described how, as Academy students, a party had set forth for Epping Forest on Midsummer’s Night, catching the last train to Chingford and camping overnight in a manufactured grotto:

These young enthusiasts, dressed in the roughest and most eccentric attire... armed with hampers and baskets filled with victuals... [would] stumble in the darkness of night through Epping Forest... until they reached a clearing that was considered suitable for their Midsummer Night’s revels. Chinese lanterns were hung on the trees, the blankets and rugs spread on the dewy ground, the wood for the fire, around which the young madcaps were gathered, having been annexed from the railway track; grog was brewed on the illicit blaze... the hours of the night were whiled away with story and song and dance, the sunrise being accompanied by the strains of Mr. Sims’s violin, carried to the revellers from a thicket that hid the player from their view.⁷²

For Konody this episode illustrated Sims’ innate romanticism and love of nature. It is, perhaps, even more illuminating. As a boy, Sims’ first attempts at painting took place in Epping Forest, later he returned to the theme, often depicting revels in forest settings.⁷³

In 1912 he noted that, ‘to be absorbed by the colour of a forest, at once so fugitive and eternal, is to loosen the ties of time and condition.’⁷⁴ The comment reveals Sims’ emotional connection to the landscape – especially woodland – which to him conjured up phantoms of other times and places. Kenneth McConkey has described George Moore’s similarly romantic walk through St. James’s Park, in which the London park became transformed for the writer into the memory of a painting - now a Watteau, now a Corot.⁷⁵ The mixture of real observed life, memory and imagination was crucial to the

creative process; Sims, always willing to admit to his visual sources, would now view the forest through the persistent memories of other artists' imagination. His enchanted glades, often with fountains, were reminiscent of the 18th century *fêtes galantes* of Watteau and Fragonard undergoing revived interest after the opening of the Wallace Collection in 1900 and exhibitions like *French Eighteenth Century Painting* at Duveens, Bond Street in 1906, symptomatic of a more general taste for the idyllicism and innocence of the period as an escape from the vulgar materialism of modern reality.⁷⁶

This period saw Sims experimenting with watercolour compositions with titles such as *The Swing* and *The Magic Well*, both 1906. Here he extended his spontaneous impressionism into splashy watercolour scenes of nymphs and fauns frolicking around pools. *Tumble, Froth and Fun*, 1908, [fig.53] was later described by Alan Sims as a 'characteristic nymph-bright fountain in sunshine' that 'epitomized the year's work,' for *The Observer*, at the time, it was 'entrancing and suggestive.'⁷⁷ Indeed, for this reviewer, Sims' watercolours represented a most welcome addition to his oeuvre: 'their magnetism cannot be resisted,' and 'the more you look into the branches and foliage, the more figures begin to detach themselves, until the whole garden becomes peopled with breathing forms.'⁷⁸ In these smaller paintings Sims appears able to evoke the spirits of nature and convince the viewer that these surround us continually, if we could but see them. He was not alone in his modern experiments with the imagery of 18th century *fêtes galantes*. John Singer Sargent and Wilfrid and Jane de Glehn were painting the fountains and grottoes of the Villa Torlonia, Frascati at this time, and Alexander Jamieson was working at Versailles.



Fig.53 CS, *Tumble, Froth and Fun*, 1908, watercolour on paper, photograph in archive



Fig.54 Gaston la Touche, *The Fountain of Love*, c1900, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

The French painter Gaston la Touche had been creating scenes of fountains in forest clearings around the turn of the century, for example his *Fountain of Love*, also known more prosaically as *Two Figures in a Park*, c1900, [fig.54] - a pair of lovers watching the sunlight glinting through a fountain surrounded by trees. La Touche had begun his career painting realist scenes of peasant life, before he exchanged realism for 'idealism.'⁷⁹ Like Sims, he too peopled his glades with mythical figures, sometimes juxtaposing them with contemporary references. Described by Gabriel Mourey in *The Studio* as 'a "Romantic" with all the exuberance of the school of 1830,' La Touche's vision was also filtered through the *fête galante*.⁸⁰ *The Ford*, another work of c.1900 illustrates his preoccupations. In this, a group of nymphs come to the aid of travellers in an ornate carriage that has become wedged in the ford. Philip Wilson Steer had also adopted the 18th century language in his turn-of-the-century works *Golden Rain*, c1900-1 and *Sleep*, 1898, which conjure up languorous scented bowers peopled by sensuous nudes; and in *The See-Saw*, 1901, where a group of girls play in a clearing, and C. H. Collins Baker, writing in *The Studio*, described his room decorations as '*dixhuitième* in mode' and, in theme, 'the *fête champêtre* of today.'⁸¹

Sims concentrated particularly on bacchanalian festivities but usually involving mythical creatures as opposed to figures in fancy-dress. The fauns and nymphs of his watercolours allude to an ancient pagan existence conjured up by his immersion in the countryside of Sussex and filtered through 18th century *fêtes champêtres*. The fountains, follies and vast marble statues that appear as props are unequivocal reminders that these locations bear the mark of human intervention and are not natural spaces inhabited only by supernatural figures but have some link to reality. His woodlands are not wild forests, but are more likely to be in gardens, in parks or in the grounds of local stately

homes such as Petworth and Parham House with their 18th century pleasure grounds and ornamental statuary – both houses close to the Sims’ home and to which they made regular family trips according to Agnes’ diary.⁸² A later example where inclusion of an ornate balustrade and marble urn sites the action securely in this kind of environment is *Gentle Love loose not Thy dart, Thou canst not wound her heart*, 1911 [fig.55].⁸³ This world was once inhabited by Watteau and Monticelli’s casts of players – and would be now, in *The Little Faun*, by the genteel participants of an *al fresco* afternoon tea.

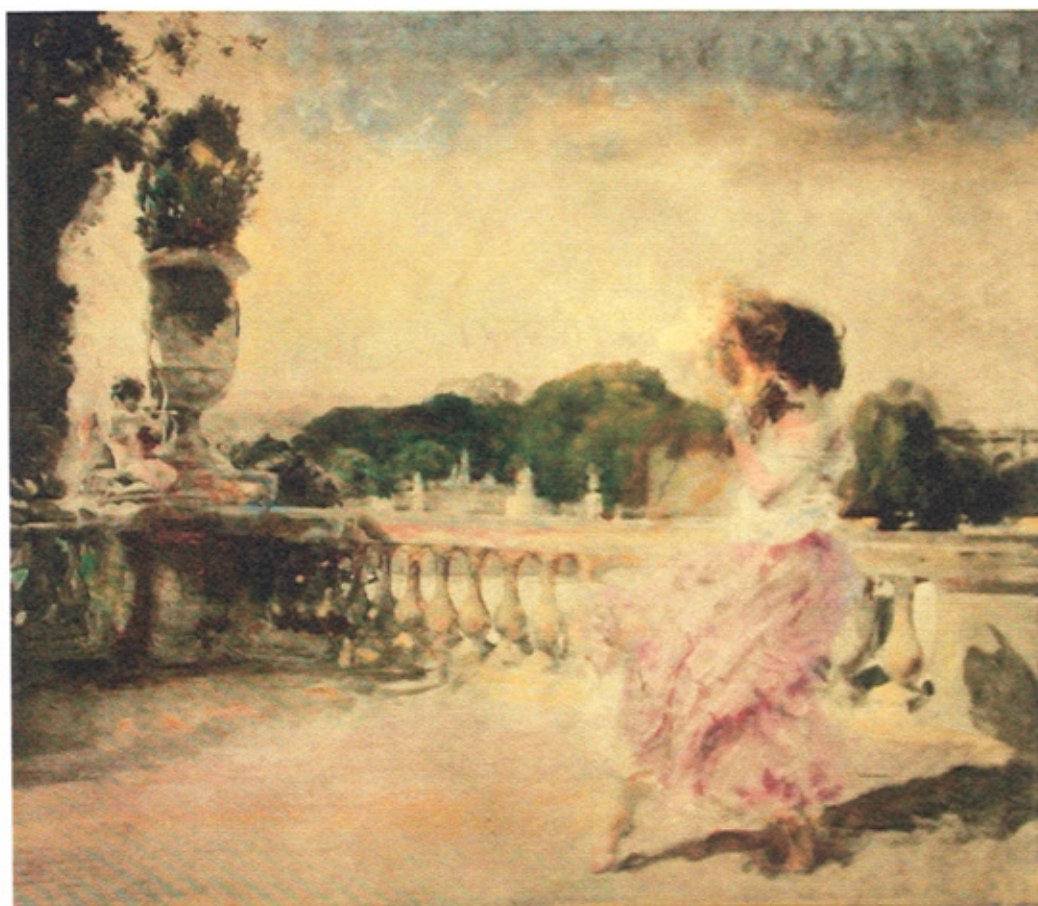


Fig.55 CS, *Gentle Love, Loose not Thy dart, Thou canst not wound her Heart*, 1911, Pastel tinted print, archive GB3025/1/2/27

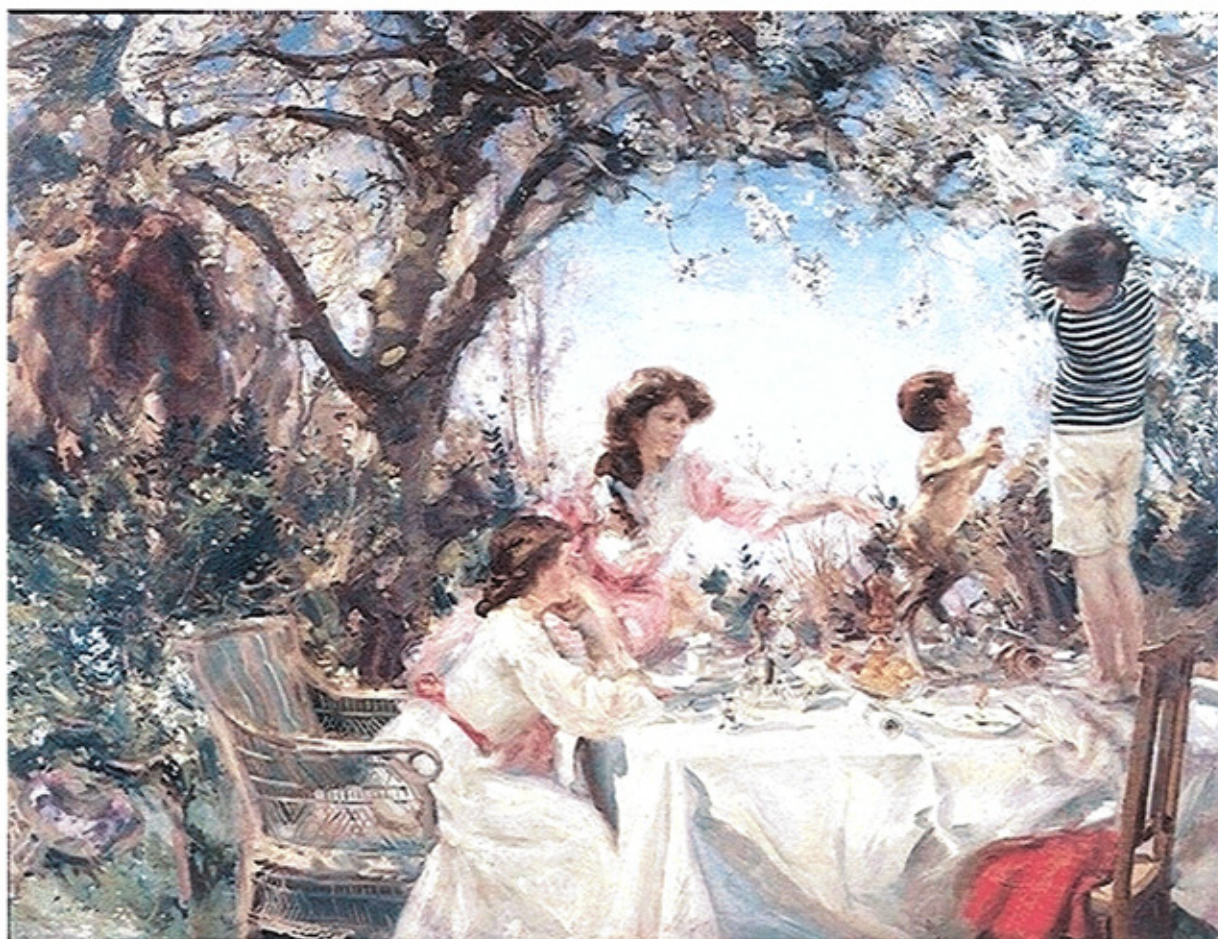


Fig.56 CS, *The Little Faun*, 1908, oil on canvas, Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro

In *The Little Faun*, 1907, [figs. 56-58] and *A Night Piece to Julia*, 1908, the fluidity of Sims' handling suggests a fantasy fleetingly observed. These rural arcadias are peopled with creatures of myth and legend and the loose brushwork and brilliance of colour emphasise the sense of transience recognized by the *Observer* review which commented on the 'shy, mythic, phantom beings, who show no fear of you and inspire no fear in you, save the fear that they might vanish if your curiosity take you too near.'⁸⁴ The *Daily Mail* suggested that Sims' technique was to peer deeply 'into the stems and branches of a garden until they become transformed into the semblance of fauns,' and that he exploited the sense that our eyes play tricks on us, certainly in terms of the two girls in the painting who are 'neither startled nor curious' by the appearance of the faun,

for ‘they simply know it does not exist.’⁸⁵ Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*, 1908, evoked this same sense of transience and impalpability when describing the faun figure. His ‘Pan’ appears as an awe-inspiring deity whose presence irrevocably alters the lives of the heroes and simultaneously erases their memories of this ever occurring, ‘they slowly realised all they had seen and all they had lost, [as] a capricious little breeze ... shook the dewy roses and blew lightly and caressingly in their faces; and with its soft touch came instant oblivion.’⁸⁶ A sketch in the archive is evidence of Sims’ interest in the Pan figure.⁸⁷ In this sepia ink and chalk/pastel drawing he depicts a group of nymphs and fauns prostrate in worship of an indistinct omnipresent figure towering over the background. The drawing is untitled and unfinished, and presumably Sims abandoned the idea without taking it any further, but here his representation coincided with Grahame’s. For both, the faun (and in Sims’ case other mythological figures linked to the countryside - nymphs and cherubs) was suggestive of pleasures lost and reglimpsed and, as such, both allude to wider concerns about the contemporary loss of rural innocence and idyllicism.



Fig.57 CS, watercolour copy of *The Little Faun* (detail), c.1908, Bury Museum and Art Gallery



Fig.58 CS, Study for *The Little Faun*, c1908, oil on panel, archive GB3025/2/7

In *The Little Faun* Sims presents us with an Edwardian tea party, comparable in this sense to works such as James Guthrie's *Midsummer* of 1892 [fig.59], and Walter Osborne's *Tea in the Garden*, 1902 [fig.60]. These earlier paintings both employ the impressionistic rapid brushmarks, dabs of colour and sketchily unfinished areas interlocking to represent the experience of looking. The eye flickers about the scene, alighting upon one area after another, never seeing the image as a whole, as in real life it is impossible to do. Sims' studio notes made when painting *The Little Faun* echo this aspect of impressionism and reinforce his departure from the Pre-Raphaelite technique of his earliest paintings. He reminded himself that 'finish all over defeats itself, insist on one piece,' the 'two girls and tablestuff should look as if all done together,' therefore situating the contemporary elements as one part and leaving the fauns and woodland as another. The boy on the table is not included in either grouping, the handling of this

figure is tighter than the rest of the canvas and his striped pullover is conspicuously different from the lush vegetation of the surroundings. He is present as a separate category, a lynchpin between reality and fantasy – he simultaneously anchors the scene and allows for the presence of the imaginary figures. Like J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* - a character we know Sims was familiar with after attending the stage play with his family and exhibiting next to Arthur Rackham's illustrations of the story - the child was a intermediary between the worlds of reality and fantasy.⁸⁸

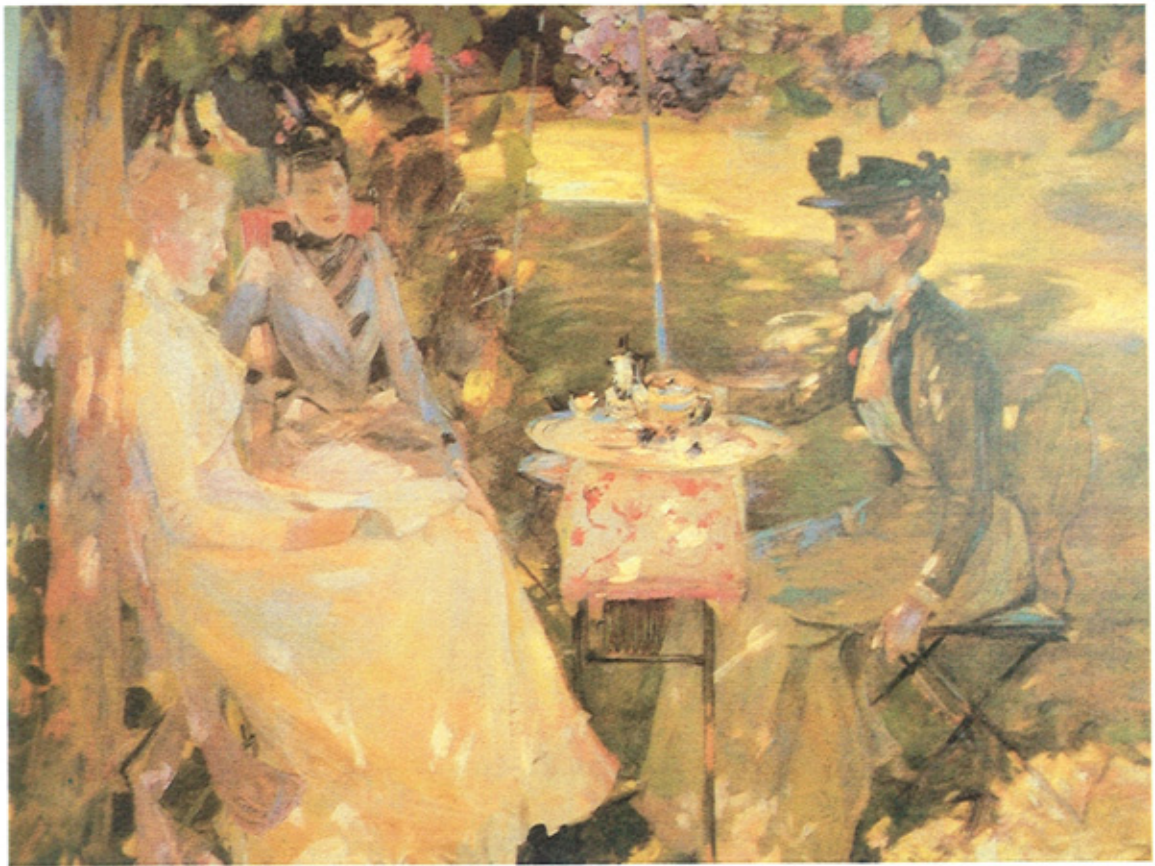


Fig.59 James Guthrie, *Midsummer*, 1892, Royal Scottish Academy, Diploma Collection, Edinburgh



Fig.60 Walter Osborne, *Tea in the Garden* , 1902, oil on canvas, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin

Gaston la Touche also created a representation of a faun and a contemporary figure. His version, *La Bonté D'Âme*, (*The Kind Soul*) [fig.61], crossed the line of credibility even further. His injured faun appears in the act of being bandaged by a woman who has fetched her first aid kit from her car – clearly visible in the background. This panel was one of four that La Touche created for the French Ministry of Agriculture, and was reproduced in *The Studio* review of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, 1907.⁸⁹ The fact that the painting was designed purely as decoration and was not intended to stand alone as an easel painting, possibly excuses the incongruities of the scene. However the sentiment – of the supernatural intruding upon modern reality - was not as eccentric as it appears. Two years later Frank Bramley exhibited *And Mocks my Loss of Liberty*, RA 1910, [fig.62], - a young woman clothed, as in the Sims, in a contemporary white dress

with coloured sash, sitting in the foreground of a sunny woodland scene gazing out past the viewer. Behind her, sitting on a rock and brandishing a bow and arrow, is a grinning cupid. We witness again the collision of the worlds of fantasy and reality here united by a fluid, painterly handling. Writing in 1905, Sims had recommended painting with 'careful swagger' across planes of flickering colour and reinforcing the sense of the instability of material surfaces by suggesting what has been described as the 'temporary glow of violet shadows.'⁹⁰ Sims had hinted at modern life in the bright stripes of his child's pullover, jarring against the languid atmosphere of the rest of the scene.⁹¹ Bramley's figure poses as if for a fashionable portrait and seems unaware of the background cupid. Scratching the surface of the rural idyll or domestic garden would reveal an altogether more spiritual or supernatural world lurking beneath the layer of leisured respectability.



Fig.61 Gaston la Touche, *La Bonté D'Âme*, c1907, French Ministry of Agriculture



Fig.62 Frank Bramley, *And Mocks my Lack of Liberty*, c1910, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown

In *A Night Piece to Julia*, [fig.63] shown in the Academy of 1909, Sims enters further into the realms of dreams and visions, depicting a sleeping woman surrounded by fairies, elves and shooting stars - all features of the poem by Robert Herrick referred to by the title.⁹² Sims also includes rabbits, children and a white peacock or phoenix making what the *Manchester Guardian* described as a 'work of poetic bric-a-brac.'⁹³ In this painting, the artist makes flesh the sleeper's dream visions – the audience is invited inside her imagination, the scene surrounding her represents the visualization of her thoughts. The painting refers perhaps to Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, 1781, or Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth Monsters*, 1797-98, both of which made manifest the sleeper's visions.⁹⁴ Several studies of sleep and dreams were beginning to be published

by the end of the 19th century – Havelock Ellis and William James had both produced reports of experiments carried out on the subconscious mind, in narcotically and hypnotically induced trances respectively.⁹⁵ Ellis' writings about his experiments with the narcotic cactus Mescal, give a detailed description of the visions and hallucinations he experienced whilst under its influence. He wrote of the 'flower-like shapes... gorgeous butterfly forms or endless folds of glistening, iridescent, fibrous wings of wondrous insects... richness of color... glitter and sparkle,' all of which could describe the luscious colours and flickers of light in *A Night Piece to Julia*.⁹⁶ The painting is also reminiscent of earlier examples of Victorian fairy painting, in particular John Anster Fitzgerald's three versions of *The Stuff that Dreams are Made Of* c.1857-8 [fig.64].⁹⁷ A major source for the Victorian fairy painters as for Fuseli, had been Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The Times* review of the 1900 Beerbohm Tree production illustrates the significance of the concept of a dream, both within the plot of the play itself, and in the experience of the contemporary theatre audience:

The glow dies away, the stage is swallowed up in gloom, the lights in the house are suddenly turned up, and the play is over. It is as if the audience were rudely awakened from a pleasing vision... There is a quick shifting of lights and they find themselves blinking at the curtain, wondering whether it has not really all been a dream.⁹⁸

This situation whereby the real and the fantastical are confused, through the intrusion of one on the other's environment is, as we have seen, a significant aspect of Sims' paintings. The self-conscious theatricality of *Julia* - the lime-lit scene, cast of extras and suggestion of a proscenium arch in the tonality of the composition - adds to the sense that all is not as it first appears. As in *The Little Faun*, Sims has attempted in *Julia* to anchor the vision in reality. The sleeping girl, life-size children immediately next to her and rabbits are indicative of a real scene, albeit idyllic. The shooting stars, rainbows and fairies point towards a more extra-ordinary setting and suggest the underlying possibility of glimpsing another world.⁹⁹

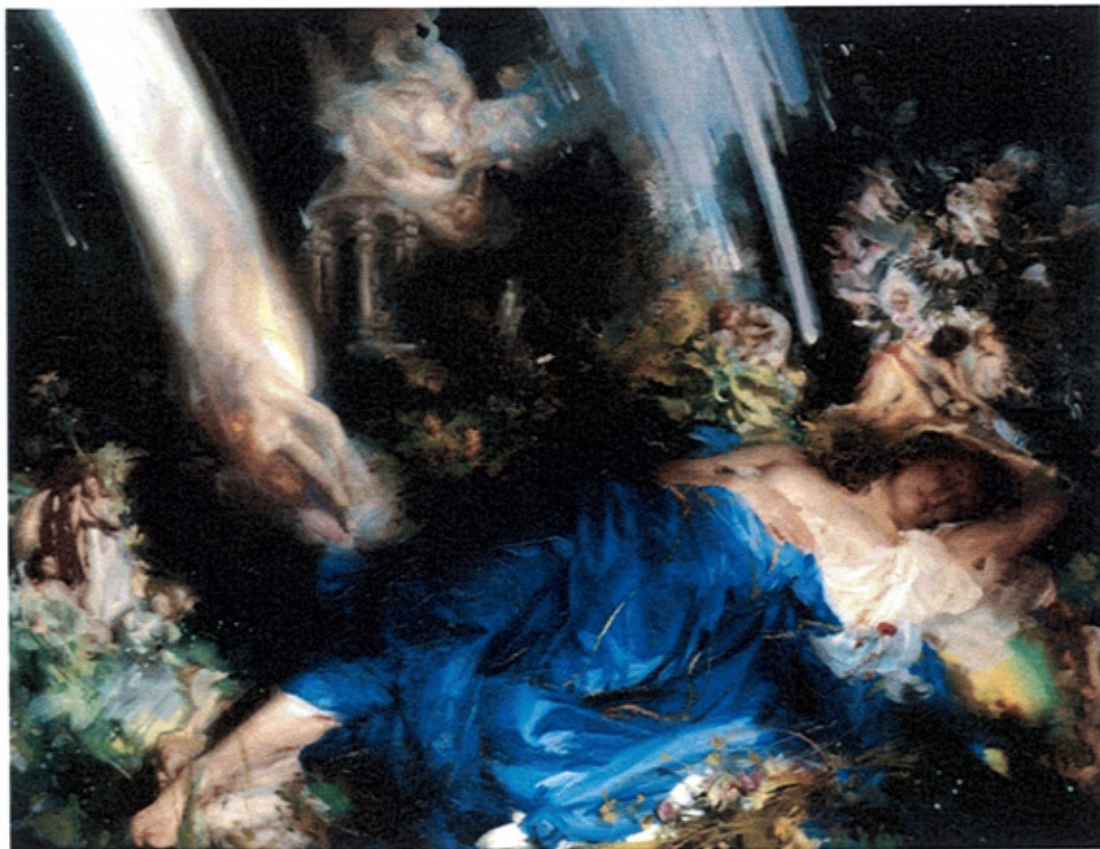


Fig.63 CS, *A Nightpiece to Julia*, 1908, oil and tempera on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.64 John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Stuff that Dreams are Made Of*, 1858, oil on canvas, Private Collection

Although thematically diverse, the paintings produced in this period have in common that they are all set in rural as opposed to urban environments – islands, glades, grottoes, gardens – which allows for the introduction of supernatural qualities and imaginary figures. Immersion in the Sussex countryside had allowed Sims to indulge his fantasies, his growing sons provided cherubic models and in 1909 his third son, Peter was born, inspiring a whole new set of scenes of maternity. The return of this preoccupation perhaps contributed to his increasing interest in sacred imagery – equating maternity with nativity - particularly in reference to Italian Primitive painting. Works with titles such as *Mother Worship* and *Child Worship*, both 1909, display clear correlations between Sims’ tenderness towards his baby son and his sense of the sacred undertones of maternal imagery. The presentation of observed reality underpinned by the conventions of religious iconography would prove yet another example of Sims’ interest in colliding worlds. By 1910 the reviews of Sims’ second Leicester Galleries exhibition suggest that his ‘happy combinations of realism and symbolism,’ and ‘refreshingly vigorous and elastic’ technique made him the ‘Peter Pan of Art.’¹⁰⁰ For the *Daily Chronicle* critic he was ‘the child who never grows up [however] I do not want him to grow up,’ and for the *Art Journal* he was the ‘Ariel of the Academy.’¹⁰¹ He had taken established subjects – classical poesie, intimate reverie, *fête galante* - and dealt with them in a wholly individual and original manner by blending his ‘buoyant quality of fantasy’ with ‘a more and more intimate acquaintance and preoccupation with light.’¹⁰²

This period saw Sims building on the reputation earned from his 1906 exhibition. On January 23rd 1908 he was elected an Associate Royal Academician, recognition that resulted probably from the success of *An Island Festival*. It was perceived as a great honour for one so young and proof that ‘an influential section of the academic body is

ready to encourage fresh, wholesome work.’¹⁰³ His election was reported in the national press, and picked up by disparate provincial newspapers. For the *Liverpool Daily Post* he had ‘won his spurs,’ *The Globe* asserted that he seemed ‘destined indisputably to take a place among the ablest and most individual members of the British school.’¹⁰⁴ *The Standard* suggested that his success was a ‘sign of liberality and alertness’ on the part of the Academy which was clearly ‘putting its house in order.’¹⁰⁵ The publicity generated meant that Sims was now an established figure. His friend P. G. Konody published a feature on his career in *Cassell’s Magazine* in December 1908, and on May 20th a feature had appeared in *The World* with the auspicious title ‘Celebrities at Home: Mr. Charles Sims ARA at Sandrock Cottage Fittleworth.’ This new status allowed him perhaps to be even more experimental, his success virtually assured, or so he might have believed. Professional complacency could have been a contributory factor in the steady decline into chaos that plagued Sims’ career between 1910 and 1912. During this period the subliminal world explored in *Julia* grew ever more chaotic, threatening to engulf reality altogether, before Sims reinvented his pastoral idyll with some of the serenity of Puvis de Chavannes in *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912.¹⁰⁶ The next chapter will investigate this painting’s conception and Sims’ possible relationship to current debates within modernism before the Great War. Works from this period introduce Sims’ departure from pagan bacchanalia on his route towards *quattrocento* Christianity but still emphasise his continuing quest for a state of idyllic innocence.

¹ *Evening Standard*, undated cutting, 1906, (SSS). *Morning Post*, undated cutting, 1906, (SSS).

² They moved to Fittleworth in September 1905 and then to the neighbouring village of Lodsworth in September 1908, remaining there until 1915.

³ Harold Speed, ‘Charles Sims RA,’ op. cit., p.52. Speed, a lifelong friend of Sims, was also a painter who exhibited scenes of mythological themes regularly at the Academy. See A. Lys Baldry, ‘The Work of Harold Speed,’ *The Studio*, Vol. XV, no. 69, December 1898, pp.151-68.

⁴ Charles Sims, Studio Diary, December 9th 1905.

⁵ Harold Speed, op. cit., p.61.

⁶ Fragonard's *The Swing*, 1766, is in the Wallace Collection, London.

⁷ In some reviews this is titled *An Island Festival*, in others *The Island Festival*. Sims himself used *An Island Festival*, so for the purposes of continuity I will do the same. The columns on the left-hand side of the composition are of the Ionic order, indicating a Greek island. At the time that Sims was painting *An Island Festival*, excavations were taking place at the Palace of Knossos, Crete, at the Temple of Artemis Orthia, and Herculaneum and Silchester. Interestingly this was also the time of the now discredited 1906 Olympic Games held in Athens (the Greeks originally planned to hold the games every four years on home soil, interspersing the touring version of the event at two-yearly intervals. These plans were interrupted by WW1 and the extra domestic games are no longer regarded as valid.) It is reasonable to assume that he was aware of these highly publicized events and that the news may have influenced his choice of subject matter.

⁸ Sims, *Picture Making*, op. cit., p.112. *Liverpool Courier*, date unknown, 1907, (SSS).

⁹ This is significant – the artist has chosen to depict his labourers at leisure. Far from the hardships of agricultural toil as depicted by Clausen and La Thangue, Sims concisely illustrates the wider shift in painting from rustic naturalism to symbolic scenes of leisure and fantasy.

¹⁰ The classical imagery he used emphasised the status of Imperial Britain by its association with the Roman Empire – whether or not this was deliberate, his painting was displayed in the Imperial Exhibitions of 1909 and 1911.

¹¹ Christopher Wood in *Olympian Dreamers* used this term to describe the phenomenon of the Victorian neo-classical revival. See Wood, London: Constable, 1983, p.15. Watts had only recently died, 1904, and Alma Tadema was still exhibiting at this point so their High Victorian classicism, although seemingly out-of-date by 1907, was still very much the expected way to depict themes of this type.

¹² Sims, *Picture Making*, op. cit., p.19 and Sims Studio Diary, op. cit., c1905.

¹³ Alma Tadema and Leighton had both painted similar scenes of classical revelry, however their bacchanals had taken place in an airless vacuum, separate from reality as indicated by weather. Both artists, but particularly Alma Tadema used highly detailed settings for their figures, exhaustively researched in response to the recent archaeological discoveries.

¹⁴ *Daily Mail*, undated, 1908, and *Birmingham Post*, undated, 1907, both (SSS).

¹⁵ *The World*, date unknown, 1907, (SSS).

¹⁶ The festival was postponed owing to Edward VII's death on May 6th 1910, and took place a year later. Sims' diary records the exhibition as 'Crystal Palace 1910,' this has not been corrected to 1911, but there is no reason to suppose that the painting was not included at the later date – it was sold in 1916 to the National Gallery of New South Wales.

¹⁷ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, p.198.

¹⁸ He had been elected an ARA in 1908 which may have influenced the decision to choose his painting. He also began teaching at the Academy Schools in 1909 so it is reasonable to assume that his work was regarded favourably by this point.

¹⁹ Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., p.156.

²⁰ Greenhalgh, op. cit., p.211.

²¹ Or as Joseph Kestner has put it, of the 'Victorian High Renaissance.' See Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical Subject Painting* University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, p.76.

²² This possibly reflects the contemporary philosophy of pageantry espoused by the 'Pageant Master' Frank Lascelles: not only is a pageant a participatory entertainment but, as Deborah Ryan describes, 'it was thought important that people should transgress the roles they held in real life: for example, a blacksmith might appear as a king; the lord of the manor as a serf.' See, D. S. Ryan, 'Staging the Imperial City: The Pageant of London, 1911' in Felix Driver and David Gilbert eds. *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identities*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p.118.

²³ Several of the reviews of this piece commented on the problems of perspective and scale arguing that there is a discrepancy between the size of the figures in the foreground and those in the back.

²⁴ *The Nation*, date unknown, 1907 (SSS).

²⁵ The dimensions of the work are very nearly those of a 'Uccello' (which is 75" x 120," *An Island Festival* is 77" x 115") which would site the painting and the artist within a tradition of Western art.

²⁶ Cardiff City Hall (date unknown), Chelsea Town Hall 1911, and St Stephen's Hall, Palace of Westminster 1925-27. Under the guidance of Edwin Austin Abbey, a band of artists described as "Neo-Pre-Raphaelites" commenced work on mural panels for the Palace of Westminster between 1906-1910. Sims's own contribution, *King John, confronted by his Barons assembled in force at Runnymede, gives unwilling consent to Magna Carta, the foundation of justice and individual freedom in England, 1215*, was part of the later scheme and was not completed until 1925-27. See Clare A. P. Willsdon *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

²⁷ Sims' friend, Harold Speed, was of the opinion that the rejection of this panel was unfounded and unfair. See Speed, op. cit., p.59.

²⁸ Charles Sims, op. cit., p.11.

²⁹ See SSS for press cuttings. Sketches and cliché-verres are held in the archive illustrating a bacchanal not dissimilar from *An Island Festival* but with more overt references to the Titian.

³⁰ John Sims, in discussion with the author.

³¹ *The World*, undated, 1907, (SSS).

³² All undated, (SSS).

³³ *Daily News*, undated, 1907, (SSS).

³⁴ *Daily Mail*, undated, 1907, (SSS).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ This description suggests that Brangwyn may have been influenced by Velasquez's well-known *Feast of Bacchus*, 1628, Museo del Prado, Madrid. Here, the Bacchus' skin-tone is noticeably lighter than that of the sunburnt peasants surrounding him.

³⁷ *The Art Journal*, 1910, p.164.

³⁸ Walter Shaw Sparrow, *Frank Brangwyn and His Work*, Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson and Co. 1910, p.110.

³⁹ *Daily Mail*, undated, 1908, (SSS).

⁴⁰ *The Times*, May 2nd 1896, p.15.

⁴¹ Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., p.172.

⁴² For a list of the pageants held in England between 1905 and 1914, complete with numbers of performers and grandstand capacities, see Table 2 in Paul Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture c.1890-1914,' op. cit., pp.172-3.

⁴³ *The Times*, June 11th 1909, p.9.

⁴⁴ This event was held every Whit Monday, and was organised by the local Sunday School. See Caroline Fox and Francis Greenacre, *Painting in Newlyn 1880-1930*, London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1985, p.112.

⁴⁵ Bramley and his wife had moved from Newlyn to her home village of Grasmere, Cumbria, in 1900.

⁴⁶ Although by 1906 Cornwall was beginning to be known as an area of tourist interest, it was through fishing that the communities had traditionally survived.

⁴⁷ In 1907 Gotch exhibited *Golden Youth* at the Academy. Here his costumed children process through a landscape. This painting is also clearly an allegory, the figures are lit by low evening light glancing across them and fading quickly to darkness. Unusually here though the artist also includes fashionable Chinese lanterns reminiscent of those in Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* which places the scene as contemporary and secures it as 'fancy dress' rather than as a history painting.

⁴⁸ Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., p.152.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p.152-3.

⁵⁰ Sims would have been well aware of Clausen and Millet's use of the hay-rick and, of course, Monet's as a vehicle to explore light and atmosphere. Here it is as if he acknowledges established contemporary and historical precedents but by not concurring with any of them, comes up with something original.

⁵¹ *Punch*, May 15th 1907, p.357.

⁵² June 6th 1907, p.11.

⁵³ These preoccupations were very popular in late Victorian and Edwardian society, Edward Burne-Jones' *Pygmalion* series of 1868-70 and George Bernard Shaw's stage-play version of 1913 are both examples.

⁵⁴ Pageantry is of course also related to the idea of the *tableau vivante*.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, June 26th 1907, p.12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Agnes Sims records a visit to the *Empire* at Leicester Square in early 1906, so the couple were familiar with music hall culture. Visiting music halls was becoming an acceptable past-time for the middle classes by this point, see Richard Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *British Music Hall*, London: Gentry Books, 1965, no.78.

⁵⁸ Unattributed newspaper review (SSS).

⁵⁹ The depiction of the dog in the centre of the image gives us a sense of scale to measure the nudes by. In relation to the dog, they are lifesize.

⁶⁰ Whilst not completed until 1911, Thomas Brock's Queen Victoria Memorial Fountain outside Buckingham Palace would have been under construction at this point and widely publicised.

⁶¹ Alan Sims, op. cit., p.108.

⁶² *The World*, 'Celebrities at Home: Mr. Charles Sims ARA at Sandrock Cottage, Fittleworth,' May 20th 1908, pp. 906-7.

⁶³ Presumably to suggest her quiet support of his career, as the author describes her as his 'best critic... [who] takes a common-sense view of the subjects.' Ibid.

⁶⁴ Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Fountain of Youth* is in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin.

⁶⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and other Exhibitions* trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, London: Phaidon Press, 1965, pp.7-9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.8.

⁶⁷ The first mention of the term is when Sims describes his working process in *The Little Faun* c.1908. In this painting there are no illustrations of rainbows themselves, however the work itself is vibrantly coloured, like a rainbow.

⁶⁸ *Yorkshire Observer*, undated, (SSS), 1908.

⁶⁹ *Black and White*, undated, (SSS), 1908.

⁷⁰ Supplement to *The Observer*, undated, (SSS), 1908.

⁷¹ *Gentlewoman*, undated, (SSS), 1906.

⁷² P. G. Konody, 'Mr. Charles Sims ARA and His Art,' *Cassell's Magazine*, December 1908, pp.470-1.

⁷³ Charles Sims, op. cit., p.96.

⁷⁴ Sims, July 15th 1912, Studio Diary.

⁷⁵ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., pp.183-200, in which he refers to George Moore, 'Impressions in St. James's Park,' *The Speaker*, 30th September, 1893, p.352.

⁷⁶ The Wallace Collection opened at Hertford House in June 1900. See *The Times*, May 14th 1906, p.4. Bastien-Lepage had also experimented with the *fête galante*, creating in c.1873 his *Au Printemps*, a scene of 18th century figures and *putti* in a woodland glade surrounding a statue.

⁷⁷ Sims, op. cit., p.113. Supplement to *The Observer*, date unknown, (SSS), 1908.

⁷⁸ *The Observer*, ibid.

⁷⁹ Gabriel Mourey, 'The Work of Gaston la Touche,' *The Studio*, Vol. 16, no. 72, March, 1899, pp.77-90.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.79.

⁸¹ C. H. Collins Baker, 'Philip Wilson Steer, President of the New English Art Club,' *The Studio*, Vol. 46, no. 194, May 1909, pp.259-66. Sims' compositions can be directly related to certain of Steer's works. *The Bathers*, c1906, is for example comparable to Steer's *The Embarkment*, shown in the New English Art Club in November 1900, which has in turn been compared to the work of Monticelli whom Steer was known to have admired. See Bruce Laughton, *Philip Wilson Steer*, Oxford Studies in the History of Art and Architecture, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, p.139. Sims' 1907 portrait of Mrs. Harold Phillips makes use of whimsical fancy-dress as did Steer's Mrs. Hammersley of the same year, and for both, the actual portrait was submerged in the surrounding paraphernalia of nature. For *The Art Journal*, Sims' 1909 portrait of Mrs. Hayes Sadler confirmed him as 'the Ariel of the Academy... if the kinematoscope could paint, it would seem to be imitating him.' Anon, *Art Journal*, 1910, pp.164-5. Here the sitter is portrayed on the veranda of a house, the grand balustrades and gardens stretching behind her. She fills only a fraction of the surface area of the painting – her decorative setting and the fashionable

milieu it implies was the real subject. The English-born Australian painter Charles Conder was also preoccupied with scenes of costumed revellers alluding to this decadent hedonistic world. Conder developed a technique of painting in watercolour on silk fans – his Pierrots and Columbines cavort in wooded glades also reminiscent of Watteau.

⁸² Parham House is near Pulborough. The Sims' were fairly regular visitors, both Parham and Petworth were within walking or cycling distance from their home. Between October 1905 and September 1907, Agnes records five separate trips to Petworth.

⁸³ Sims' title was based on John Dowland's madrigal, 'Come again, sweet love doth now invite,' from his *First booke of songes or ayres of fowre partes with tableture for lute*, first published in 1597.

⁸⁴ Supplement to *The Observer* 1908. (SSS). Fauns appeared in many other forms during this period. The French Symbolist poet Stephan Mallarmé published his *L'Après Midi d'un Faun* in 1876. This was hugely influential: Mallarmé's friend Edouard Manet illustrated the poem and Claude Debussy wrote his Impressionist tone poem of the same title in 1894. In 1912 Nijinsky choreographed his notoriously erotic version of Debussy's composition and presented it to a shocked Parisian audience. The poem remained significant to artists, writers and musicians of the 20th century – Roger Fry's translation into English was not published until 1951. Mallarmé, along with Rimbaud, was recognized as a pioneer of symbolist poetry, leading away from naturalism in literature. Their depiction was not confined to English or even European artists as the 1898 work, *Pan* by the Australian Sydney Long illustrates. As reproduced in Robert Rosenblum, Maryanne Stevens and Ann Dumas, *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000, p.106. Long's fauns frolic in a woodland with naked girls/nymphs. It is not clear whether the figures are assumed to be contemporary, there are none of the usual trappings of modern life such as clothing that would date them. The implication is more that these are all creatures of the forest, spellbound or enchanted by the music of Pan's pipe.

⁸⁵ *Daily Mail*, undated, (SSS), 1908.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, London: Methuen and Co., 1908, p.156.

⁸⁷ Archive GB3025/1/4/25.

⁸⁸ Sims was well aware of Barrie's story, he exhibited at the Goupil Gallery in 1906-7 next to Arthur Rackham's illustrations of the tale. The *Manchester Guardian* review of the show mentions Sims and Rackham in the same sentence: 'charming and fanciful paintings of Mr. Charles Sims, the delightful 'Peter Pan' drawings of Mr. Arthur Rackham... prominent among the efforts of our younger men.' Undated review (SSS p.3). The character of Peter Pan first appeared in 1902 in Barrie's *The Little White Bird*. It is here that he is described as a 'betwixt and betweeny' caught between the worlds of man and the fairies, or reality and fantasy. Agnes Sims recorded family theatre trips to see the stage version of the tale at the Duke of York's Theatre, on February 12th 1906, January 1st and December 24th 1907.

⁸⁹ *The Studio*, Vol. 41, no.172, July 1907, p.131. This was the same issue that contained A. Lys. Baldry's feature about Sims and his work, so it is unlikely that he missed the reproductions of La Touche's panels although it is not feasible to suggest that this influenced his *Little Faun* as according to his studio diary he had already embarked upon a version of the painting in late 1906. Three finished versions of the painting exist – the full-size finished work is in the collection of the Royal Cornwall Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge have a smaller oil sketch, and Bury Museum and Art Gallery have a large watercolour version, interestingly in reverse.

⁹⁰ Sims, op. cit., p.75. Kenneth McConkey, 'Newlyn Naturalist and Edwardian Idealist,' in *Frank Bramley R.A. 1857-1915*, Lincoln: Usher Gallery and Lincolnshire County Council, 1999, p.15.

⁹¹ According to John and Ann Sims, this child was modelled by their father Alan, who remembered the striped pullover well, having broken his shoulder-blade in it – the sweater was then cut off him in order to set the shoulder. This mishap is recorded in Agnes Sims' diary as occurring on May 13th 1906, by which time the first version of *The Little Faun* must have been painted.

⁹² Sims' studio diary refers to two versions of *Julia*, one in oils was commenced in 1908, the larger, tempera version shown in the Academy was painted in 1909. Robert Herrick, *A Night Piece to Julia*, published in Alfred Pollard, ed. *The Works of Robert Herrick*, vol. II. London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1891, pp.17-18. Herrick wrote many poems to 'Julia,' presumably a fantasy lover, but this is unproven.

⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, undated review, 1909 (SSS p.52).

⁹⁴ A version of Fuseli's *Nightmare* was secured by the Prints and Drawings room of the British Museum in 1886.

⁹⁵ See Havelock Ellis, 'Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise,' *The Contemporary Review*, January 1898, and William James, 'The Hidden Self,' *Scribner's Magazine* Vol. 7, No. 3, 1890, pp.361-373. Whilst Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* had been published in 1899, it was not translated into English until 1913. Havelock Ellis's *The World of Dreams* was also published after this time, in 1911. However, the significance of dreams and sleep were becoming common subjects for debate when Sims painted his *Night Piece*.

⁹⁶ Ellis, op. cit., p.4.

⁹⁷ The first of this series, *The Nightmare*, clearly refers to drug-induced sleep. Jeremy Maas has pointed out that as the series progresses the overt references to narcosis are diluted, until with the final image the girl appears merely sleeping. The major difference between Fitzgerald's sleeping girl and Sims' is in their surroundings – Fitzgerald's lies on a plush four-poster bed indoors, Sims's *Julia* is surrounded by wild flowers in a garden. Fitzgerald's scene of a young girl in her bedroom appears far more staged, composed and therefore voyeuristic than does Sims's glimpse of the girl settled in the grass. *Julia* is on a relatively small scale, (28" x 36"), it is a private reverie, a personal fantasy.

⁹⁸ Anon, 'Her Majesty's Theatre: A Midsummer Night's Dream' *The Times*, January 11th 1900, p.4.

⁹⁹ This painting was Sims's first real experiment with tempera as a medium. Tempera does not lend itself easily to the spontaneity and mutability of Impressionist technique as oil paint does – it is a far more static medium, mistakes could not be as easily covered or blended. In the artist's studio notes, made whilst painting *Julia*, he records the struggles he had, 'Still undecided what is the best method for finishing, stippling, washing, or scumbling... Is full brush the secret? – paint as if enamelling... (cannot make a success of stippling).' Studio Notebook, January 16th and February 3rd 1909, pp.1-3. So despite the apparent spontaneity, this image was carefully planned – the artist continually set himself challenges and experimented throughout his career. *The Times* described the painting as a 'dainty illustration' and suggested that if anyone should paint this particular subject it should be Sims, and that 'let the method be that transparent tempera-painting of which this is so fascinating an example.' Undated review, 1909, (SSS p.51).

¹⁰⁰ *Black and White*, undated, 1910 (SSS). *Telegraph*, undated, 1910 (SSS). *Daily Chronicle*, undated, 1910 (SSS).

¹⁰¹ *Daily Chronicle*, *ibid.*, and Anon, *The Art Journal*, 1910, p.164-5.

¹⁰² *Manchester Guardian*, undated, 1910 (SSS). *Standard*, undated, 1910 (SSS).

¹⁰³ *Yorkshire Post*, undated, 1908 (SSS). The scrapbook contains pages of cuttings devoted to Sims' election, and a list of some twenty-four publications that covered the story. The general consensus was that he was a worthy candidate who had proved his skill with *An Island Festival*.

¹⁰⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, undated, (SSS). *Globe*, undated, (SSS).

¹⁰⁵ *Standard*, undated, (SSS).

¹⁰⁶ See for example *Legend*, 1910, and *The Shower*, 1911.

Chapter Three: 1910-1914

To 'weave for God the garment thou seest Him by'¹

Between 1910 and the outbreak of the Great War, Sims' career reached, and recovered from, a crisis point. The acclaim attracted by his election as an ARA in 1908 proved, perhaps, more of a burden than an honour, as the relative security of this position coincided with a phase of increasingly incoherent experimentation. Sims appears to have struggled for a time to live up to his newly acquired status, searching for originality and producing a succession of modern re-workings of mythological and historical themes – successful in *An Island Festival*, 1907, but by *Legend*, 1910, appearing too chaotic and disjointed for legibility. In 1911 as Sims berated himself, 'I feel that my rotten work has been done a thousand times and a thousand times better,' he began to focus on sacred themes, investigating a specific range of historical precedents on which to base his imagery.² This process of selectivity and refinement, and an apparent desire to produce an art that was meaningful and of some potential use, was a conscious one as continually witnessed by comments in his studio diaries. In August 1910, for example, he states that 'all innocent and frivolous subjects are not to be tabooed, but to be guarded against and not to absorb the time for important work.'³ At certain points the painter's ambitions reflect those of the poet and critic Laurence Binyon, whom Sims knew after they worked together on the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition and whose writings were widely published by this date.⁴ In December 1910 Binyon's plea in the *Saturday Review* was for 'an art which shall be more profound, more intense, more charged with essential spirit,' and Sims' conviction in his studio diary 4 months earlier was, 'that Energy is Beauty. Such is the artist's mission, to find patterns of energy... I shall make discoveries and work no more aimlessly. (Blake).'⁵

Binyon's ideals were, for him, best fulfilled in the contemporary art of Augustus John, whose paintings at the NEAC in 1909 had supplied a 'felt want,' and whose aim, as Binyon saw it, was to 'regain that early vision' characterized by 'the child's freshness of soul, its ecstasy, its wonder, its intuitive neglect of what does not matter.'⁶ At this point Sims' own stated ideals draw him into interesting relationships with contemporaries like John and past art – also praised by Binyon – such as Italian Primitivism and the British Romantic tradition best represented by Blake. Sims, like Binyon, sought a spiritual reality beneath the surface of everyday life, and Binyon's view of art as an essential language 'expressing the whole modern man' both 'his spiritual desire' and 'his material existence,' coincided with Sims' convictions.⁷ Sims and Binyon reached similar conclusions about the role of art and the importance of spirituality in portraying the vitality of existence, and agreed on a particular ideal of modern painting distinguished primarily by 'character, life, and rhythmic power.'⁸ This chapter will examine the key works that demonstrate Sims' trajectory from the apparent chaos of *A Night Piece to Julia* towards the more elemental Wartime *Seven Sacraments* and ultimately led to the conception of his *Spirituals*. This path is by no means a simple one, but it represents a crucial and highly prolific period in his career and, as such, is a pivotal stage of his development.

Sims – as we know - had previously set his imaginary or supernatural scenes in the English countryside, and he would now investigate these possibilities with sacred subject matter. His pre-War experiments emulated historical examples of religious painting - adopting in turn *quattrocento* simplicity, Renaissance emphasis on anatomical detail, Baroque ornamentation – endlessly seeking the appropriate method with which to produce modern sacred images, and, characteristically, in most canvasses amalgamating

more than one technique. In his *Sacraments* he finally decided on *quattrocento* method as the ideal, and it was through an extreme simplification of composition most influenced it seems, by Giotto, that Sims in effect rescued himself from total incoherency. But however closely his experiments with sacred imagery reflected the concerns of some contemporary writers and critics this did not enhance his reputation in the long term. Unlike for example, Stanley Spencer, who explored similar themes at the same time and is now popularly regarded as a visionary painter, Sims' preoccupation with sacred sources appears to have led his career further into obscurity.⁹ Following discussion of his most over-loaded and illegible of images, this chapter will seek to identify the individual strands explored, to examine his engagement with religious iconography in the pre-war years and to investigate the ways in which this coincided with and diverged from current thought.

Contemporary interest in the *quattrocento* manifested itself in a variety of ways during this period. Ruskin's writings about the Pre-Raphaelites' sacred underpinning, especially relating to *quattrocento* painting and particularly to Giotto, had been republished in 1906; Roger Fry's Slade School lectures of around 1912 have been described as 'his gospel of Giotto-and-Cézanne;' and, in 1912, the British School at Rome - founded in 1901 specifically to train British painters and architects in the techniques of the Italian Primitives - was granted its Royal Charter.¹⁰ In 1913 Binyon's *The Art of Botticelli: An Essay in Pictorial Criticism* was published. The connection he suggested between Giotto and the Pre-Raphaelites (via Blake and Palmer) provided certain British painters and their critics with a romantic native tradition of, primarily, landscape painting.¹¹ Sims appeared at this time in his studio notes and diary entries to be engaged with this idealized tradition, but whilst his paintings of the period appear

now eccentric and singularly concerned with an unfashionable theme, an analysis voiced at his death by various critics, others, like for example, Spencer, have often been associated with a tradition that encompasses Blake and Palmer. Although Sims had referred to Blake extensively in his studio notes from 1910, it was not until the posthumous exhibition of his *Spirituals* in 1928 that the connection was made (and swiftly discredited).¹²

In the years following his election as an ARA Sims made a series of paintings that extended his interest (exhibited successfully in *An Island Festival*) in reworking historical or mythological themes in a contemporary fashion. This preoccupation also coincided with Binyon's defence of painters' use of subjects from literature, history and mythology as a 'fund of shared images' which, for John Hatcher, had 'accrued resonance and symbolic power over the centuries' and represented 'mankind's communal imagination.'¹³ But – as demonstrated – Sims' use of these time-honoured subjects became – in formal terms – progressively more chaotic. *Julia*, for example, was only the introduction to his technique of collaging disparate elements of mythological imagery into an incongruous whole. In the damning words of the *Athenaeum*, *Legend*, 1910, as 'a mere medley of unrelated objects' and *The Shower*, 1911, are perhaps the most problematic canvases in these terms.¹⁴ *The Shower* and the slightly earlier *Crab-Apple Tree*, 1910, are overt attempts on Sims' part to link thematically his figures and their landscape surroundings through an implied sacred connection. These paintings represent the transitional stage between the pagan *fêtes galantes* and the more fundamental *Seven Sacraments of Holy Church*, exhibited in 1917.

In *The Shower* [fig.65] Sims depicted nymphs and cherubs linked to the surrounding landscape as if bound up with the cycle of the passing seasons. The composition is tripartite like an altar screen, on the left-hand side it is dark and overcast, a heavy shower is falling and the nymph on this side is wringing the rain-water from her hair into the hands of a cherub kneeling in a puddle. On the right the sky is clear and blue, a tree in full blossom dominates and frames the figure walking into the scene. The two halves are linked by a peculiar structure in the centre – a cascading waterfall of the same sky-blue as the fabric in which the two nymphs are clad, which tumbles to the earth in a mass of quasi-Baroque *putti*. The sense is that the water (rain and waterfall) becomes flesh as it hits the ground – the figures are perhaps a physical manifestation of the life-source. The central structure (reminiscent of the fountains in the Bois de Boulogne which Sims may have seen on one of his numerous trips to Paris) is the axis around which the cyclical action revolves, a sense enhanced by the two exits from the scene.¹⁵ But Sims' handling confused his viewers – the *Manchester Guardian* was reminded – strangely - 'of the Futurists by its medley of things half seen, movements half grasped and broken impressions. As representation it belongs to the same class as a Boccioni; as decoration it would hang as a Fragonard.'¹⁶ This review recognised that although Sims' *Shower* still contained elements of his previous *fêtes galantes*, he was now attempting to tackle something different with, perhaps, modern undertones (in terms of Binyon's ideals) though the reference to Boccioni specifically seems incongruous. The landscape was taking on a more symbolic role, associated with the traditional format of sacred imagery, but this was not yet sufficiently resolved for legibility.

Painted in 1910, *A Crab-Apple Tree* [fig.66] explored similarly primordial symbols and proved equally difficult to contemporary reviewers. In place of the water, this painting

explores the notion of the tree as physical and metaphysical life-source. The tree - symbolic of *Genesis*, of Christ's crucifix, of the maypole and associated fertility rites - simultaneously blossoms and bears fruit which falls to earth and springs forth as dancing infants. Sims was dissatisfied with the painting, describing it as 'so common as to seem the work of an old amateur who had been well taught,' but felt the subject was important and worth continuing with, 'better go on tho' - 'tis a subject that can be done again and again and so variously, spring and autumn, blossom and fruit and lovely groups of infants.'¹⁷



Fig.65 CS, *The Shower*, 1911, oil on canvas, Aberdeen Art Gallery, image from photograph in archive



Fig.66 CS, *A Crab-Apple Tree*, 1910, oil and tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

Reviews of *A Crab-Apple Tree* commented again on his use of disparate styles. The *Spectator* identified these as the ‘peculiar luminosity and subtlety of gradation which we associate with Umbrian art’ and on the other hand ‘an evanescent and wholly modern touch.’¹⁸ Whilst trying to emulate the serenity of an Italianate landscape, his depiction of the circling figures was handled in a more impressionistic way. Another review saw this technique as wholly appropriate, the handling of the children added to the illusion that they were moving.¹⁹ But the importance of this work is not stylistic but thematic, it attempts the amalgamation of Paganism and Christianity – on one hand a maypole dance, on the other possibly referring to the fall of Eve. Sims accompanied the painting by a made-up rhyme in archaic language and attributed to a so-called ‘Martin of Tewkesbury.’²⁰ The *Nottingham Guardian* reviewer’s suggestion that ‘painter and

rhymers [were] the same person,' was confirmed by Harold Speed who recalled that Sims had told him 'on the quiet, that he had made the whole thing up and there was no such poet.'²¹ If the rhyme was indeed Sims' it was clearly an attempt to locate the scene in some indeterminate Middle Ages, where Christian and pagan myths coexisted and the scene could be symbolic of more universal themes of religion – ancient and modern, general and specific, fused together in an elemental expression of the sacred landscape.

Perhaps similar universal sensibilities account for *A Spring Muse*, 1910 [fig.67], a pastoral landscape with lake and folly (suggesting again, the grounds of an English stately home) and, in the foreground, a couple in nymph and shepherd guise. The semi-nude male is recognisably influenced by the contorted foreshortening and defined musculature of High Renaissance frescoes, and the female, draped in a diaphanous gown and holding a lyre, bears more than a passing resemblance to Botticelli's *Primavera*.²² She is haloed, and whilst we might expect this to emphasise the Christian connotations of Sims' art historical borrowings, here he introduces a pagan symbol - for her halo is not gilt, but in the form of a rainbow.²³ Thus references to Michelangelo, Raphael and Botticelli are bizarrely linked to the ancient landscape and earth-worship, another example of Sims' experimental attempts to fuse disparate elements which, like *Legend*, did not quite succeed. For *The Times* there was 'some incongruity between the bravura of the trees and the timid treatment of his figures.'²⁴ As in *The Shower*, the gulf between the real elements and the fantasy ones was not sufficiently bridged for legibility, his attempts to express an idyllic universal spirituality by bringing together sacred and pagan elements must be more coherent. Sims admitted this with the observation that 'the pattern of the picture is poor, owing to starting with the landscape and too closely keeping to nature.'²⁵ For Binyon, a painter must have 'imaginative

vision,' for 'observation alone will not help him,' and unlike Blake, for example, Sims had relied too heavily on the 'impression on his eyes,' rather than on the 'impression on his soul.'²⁶

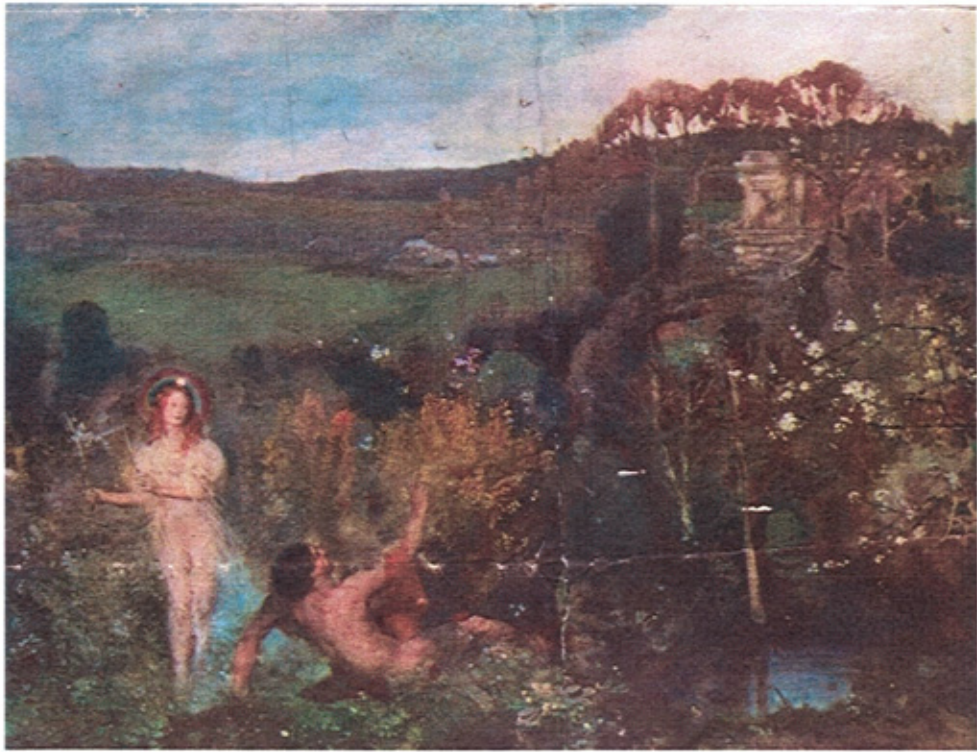


Fig.67 CS, *A Spring Muse*, 1910, oil and tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

In *Legend*, [fig.68] a woodland glade peopled by figures from various myths, the artist was far more inventive - abandoning nature almost altogether in favour of fiction and history - and the dreamlike manifestation of *Julia*'s dusk is brought into bright daylight. But without the poetic mystery afforded by the cover of darkness, the sources of Sims' imaginative picturing are too clearly exposed. This is largely due to his attempts in *Julia* to record a literal transcription of a dream – fantastic incongruities drifting to the surface of the sleeping girl's subconscious were represented as her physical (if ethereal) companions.²⁷ The phantasmagoria we accept when seen through the veil of night in *Julia*, we find absurd in the broad daylight of *Legend* and *The Shower*. Reviews of *The*

Shower recognised that Sims had reached a kind of hiatus, an inability to ‘reconcile facts with his fancies,’ for he was ‘literal everywhere except where he [was] vague.’²⁸ At the Academy *Legend* was greeted with mixed but largely negative criticism, the majority of reviewers agreeing that the artist had stretched the imagination and tolerance of his audience past an acceptable point.²⁹ The consensus was that a canvas including St. George and the dragon, Pegasus, an elderly hermit, a pair of classical lovers, cupids, a Gothic shrine and Lot’s wife as a pillar of salt was too fragmentary to be credible.³⁰ ‘A touch of the pasteboard and tinsel,’ remarked *Queen*, ‘a page of a child’s scrapbook’ scoffed *The Spectator*.³¹ These disparate elements, however, are not merely ‘an epitome of all the legendary lore of the ages,’ they are also obvious quotations from other artists’ work replanted from a fertile imagination, but his previously successful borrowings had now become too miscellaneous and illegible.³² Those composite elements of *Legend* not readily identifiable as quotations from the work of others were at least allusions. For example, the Gothic reliquary to the right of the background is an almost direct copy of a structure in Flemish painter Dieric Bouts’ *The Way to Paradise* [fig.69].³³ We can be certain from notes in the archive that Sims was referring to Bouts at the time of painting *Legend*, he presumably worked from a photograph of the earlier painting but this has not survived.³⁴



Fig.68 CS, *Legend*, 1910, oil and tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.69 Dieric Bouts, *The Way to Paradise*, 1450, Oil on wood, Musée des Beaux Arts, Lille

Legend is the stylistic accumulation of motifs and quotations overflowing from Sims' memory and imagination, collaged together in one scene, but his efforts at amalgamation resulted in chaos. His work could not continue in this vein, becoming more and more fragmentary, without ultimately losing all coherence. Increasingly Sims appears to retreat from the chaos of recent years by being more selective about his sources, removing unnecessary clutter from his compositions, no longer 'crowd[ing] all the romances he could think of onto one canvas' and concentrating on the essential relationship between figure and landscape.³⁵ These developments led him ultimately to the conception of *The Wood Beyond the World*, where the raucously pagan nymphs and *putti* of his exuberant Arcadias were transformed into more fundamental beings at one with their environment.³⁶

Sims' figure-in-landscape compositions became more concerned with sacred connotation as the observations in his studio diary became progressively comparable to Binyon's ideals of landscape painting.³⁷ For John Hatcher, Binyon believed that landscape should not be 'mimesis of the surfaces of nature or fleeting effects of sunlight,' but 'meditation on, empathy with, and intuitive insight into the living energies behind appearances.'³⁸ Sims came to share these views increasingly – hence his development away from the impressionism of his Arran paintings (for Binyon, by 1908, several English artists, had 'got over' impressionism 'like the measles,') to the more elemental *Sacraments*, via the symbolic *Wood Beyond the World*.³⁹ Binyon praised Blake's portrayal of 'the real world of Eternity, breaking in on the unreal world in which men have chosen to live,' and Sims would no doubt have concurred by this point, proposing in 1912 'a wilful departure from nature,' and in 1913 that 'the visible is but the starting point of our inventions.'⁴⁰ He decided that the 'ingredients of a perfect

picture' were 'a nude figure, sky, the tops of trees and the downs,' and produced, as a result, rather formulaic pastoral images like *Spring Song*, 1913 [fig.70] - a nude girl flanked by cherubic musicians dancing through an idyllic landscape in which the nymphs and *putti* of his previous *fêtes galantes* were freed of their 18th century trappings and became symbols of a more elemental, pantheistic consciousness.⁴¹ This painting is clearly a development from the untraced painting *Swallows*, 1912. There is a sketch [fig.71] and a photograph of the finished work in the archive in which a recognisable Agnes, holding hands with her eldest two sons, walks along a sunlit ridgetop amongst the circling birds of the title, reminiscent of the composition of *The Top o' the Hill*. Her dress however, has changed from the contemporary sashed gown of the Arran years, to a quasi-Classical drape, and the boys are nude.



Fig.70 CS, *Spring Song*, 1913, oil and tempera on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.71 CS, Sketchpad study for *Swallows*, c1912, graphite on paper, archive GB3025/4/7p.22

But the key work that forms the bridge between the romantic chaos of *Julia, Legend* and *The Shower*, and the serenity and calm of the *Seven Sacraments*, is *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912. This painting is also the most successful introduction to the artist's growing preoccupation with juxtaposing religious imagery and the landscape. Sims was now moving closer to the landscape of Blake and Palmer, whose representations of the English countryside were imbued with the beliefs of the generations of rural church-going communities that inhabited them. Pastoral Christian imagery allowed for an ambiguous but fervent expression of the apparently sacred truths underpinning secular rural life without reliance on traditional symbols.⁴²

The path towards the *Wood Beyond the World* began with a series of increasingly simplified pastoral scenes. These were undoubtedly celebrations of the reawakening of the landscape, of springtime, and could be regarded as further examples of pagan sentiment. But here Sims began to introduce rural scenes of a more Christian nature, his chosen titles reinforcing this transition. Three significant pastorals are *Then Comes in the Sweet o' the Year*, *The Month of Mary*, and *The Coming of Spring* all produced in 1912.⁴³ These have in common the depiction of open rural landscapes populated by maidens and cherubic children. The three paintings are listed consecutively in the studio records and it is more than likely that they represent different versions of the same subject with minor compositional alterations.⁴⁴ Sims was working his way around the subject, trying out various compositional arrangements and - all three depict themes of springtime and fertility, budding trees and flowers, lambs and babies - all symbolizing new life.⁴⁵ These paintings are by definition - illustrating themes of new growth and rebirth - investigations of a more sacred nature than previous works, Sims was seeking the most appropriate means through which to convey his perception of the essential

beauty and eternal elements of the landscape.⁴⁶ His experiments led him towards a more reductivist aesthetic the better to express simple, spiritual, symbolic reverence for nature, or, as David Peters Corbett has recently put it, a ‘spiritual paring down of the realities of the physical world to expressivity.’⁴⁷

Sacred iconography, especially that borrowed from past masters, provided him with one path through the chaos of his previous eclecticism. In 1912 he claimed ‘the emulation of old masters’ pieces would provide the best subjects – why encourage a mania for what is new?’⁴⁸ But the comment is slightly disingenuous, as his aim was not merely to copy - ‘it is a good plan to take an accomplished picture (old masters and modern) as a sort of jumping off point and *improve on it*.’ [My italics].⁴⁹ The visual eclecticism of previous years remained but was now linked by a common theme, for ‘no more beautiful properties are to be found than in Christian ritual – but it must be healthy – reasonable and athletic.’⁵⁰ Health and vigour, formerly pagan virtues in Sims’ *Island* and *Fountain* must now be co-opted to Christian ritual.⁵¹ This is in direct contrast to, for example, Rossetti’s depiction of Christian virtue, such as his *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, in which the pallid figures appear consumptive or drugged, and certainly not athletic.⁵² The ambition to combine athletic vigour and Christianity led Sims to attempt the depiction of another kind of idyll – not via a fleeting glimpse of a supernatural world, but now with the pure intensity of a vision. Mysticism and marginal religions fall away. In portraying healthy youths engaged in Christian ceremony the artist effectively denounced any link to the sickly aestheticism of the *fin de siècle* and his primary reference began to be *quattrocento* Italian Primitivism, an interest also reflected of course in other contemporary work.

In *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912, [fig.72] the most overt of his explorations of primitivism to date, Sims depicted in an open landscape with a lake, four adult females (a Madonna figure and three nymphs) and two groups of boys – one of infants, the other of youths. He wrote of imagining ‘children looked after by girls in gardens and palaces under lovely skies,’ here perhaps illustrating his version of William Morris’ utopian novel of the same title, first published in 1894.⁵³ The landscape is now treated far more subjectively than in the Arran paintings – the coastal scenes that had been vehicles with which to explore the effects of light and weather and suggestive of health and vigour, were now the settings where miracles occurred. *The Wood Beyond the World* was also an example of the contemporary European literary and artistic preoccupation with the magical grove or woodland. Puvis de Chavannes’ arcadian allegories in particular offered Sims’ contemporaries a universal vision of the imaginary landscape and of ideal harmony between individuals.⁵⁴ Puvis’ work appealed for its simplistic handling of form and lack of reliance on clear narrative, paintings like *The Sacred Grove Dear to the Arts and Muses* 1884 [fig.73] served as inspiration.⁵⁵ In her recent study, Jennifer Shaw has described the unique role of Puvis’ work to painters at the end of the 19th century and early years of the 20th:

What they did find... was a replacement of traditional forms of representation and the values associated with them by a simplification of form and rhythmic patterning that had its own peculiar kind of sensuous allusiveness – an allusiveness that conjured desire and evoked dream.⁵⁶

Sims was by no means alone in his response to Puvis’ example. Puvis had been an important influence on young artists studying at the Académie Julian during the 1890s. Painters such as William Rothenstein, Frederick Cayley Robinson and Charles Conder had all acknowledged his authority.⁵⁷ Cayley Robinson’s later *Pastoral*, 1923-4, was clearly influenced by Puvis’ *The Poor Fisherman*, 1881. Older artists such as Edward Burne Jones (who died in 1898) and Walter Crane had also been engaged in the

depiction of distant imaginary lands. In an oft-quoted (and unsourced) letter Burne Jones defined his vision as, 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be... in a land that no-one can define or remember, only desire.'



Fig.72 CS, *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912, tempera and oil on canvas, Tate Britain



Fig.73 Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *The Sacred Grove Beloved of the Arts and Muses*, 1884-89, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons

In Walter Crane's influential *Renaissance of Venus*, 1877, nymphs gather on the shore of an idyllic bay framed by trees and classical ruins.⁵⁸ A number of the works shown in Roger Fry's Post Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, (which, according to Agnes' diary, Sims visited in November 1910) were concerned with the depiction of enchanted clearings or groves.⁵⁹ Sims and his wife travelled around France in May 1912 and a visit to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons, housing Puvis' *Sacred Grove* is recorded in Agnes' diary.⁶⁰ The influence on *The Wood Beyond the World* is clear. But Sims' composition also quotes from Botticelli's *Primavera* – especially his three graces, who relate closely to the grouping to the left of the Botticelli. Alan Sims also compared the painting to Perugino, and there are certainly comparisons with his *Combat of Love and Charity*, 1505, [fig.74] housed in the Louvre, in which a frieze-like arrangement of figures pose in front of a lake.⁶¹



Fig.74 Pietro Perugino, *The Combat of Love and Chastity*, 1505, oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris

The Wood Beyond the World represents, perhaps, the most satisfactory of Sims' sacred landscapes; the chaos has evaporated leaving in its wake a serene, contemplative scene, a tranquil allegory of fecundity underscored by the unified relationship between figure and landscape. Here the *putti* of his *Crab-Apple Tree* and the more distant, *Childhood*, represent more than exuberant and immediate youth – they are all of a similar age and, as such, suggest a fixed and idealised point in the life-cycle. Contemporary reviews of the painting greeted it with relief, recognising it as, for the *Sunday Times*, 'the best picture he has yet painted,' and for the *Evening Standard* as 'the perfect expression of what Mr. Sims has been saying fragmentarily in paint for several years.'⁶² The painting was purchased, like his *Fountain*, for the nation by the Chantrey Bequest. His figures are bathed in late evening light, they reach up to the fluttering doves, and move 'to some unheard melody.'⁶³ Most of the reviews remarked on the rhythmical composition, the decorative handling, the debt to Puvis de Chavannes and the clear Italianate inspiration. Although by *The Wood Beyond the World* Sims has rejected the tripartite composition of *The Shower*, which evoked a folding triptych like an altarpiece, the later painting still has the atmosphere of a devotional work. But even in such a seemingly reverent homage, Sims' humour shines through, for amongst the doves, redolent of ancient symbolism, he has placed a rather more banal pigeon.

Augustus John engaged too with elemental landscapes had also been enthused by Puvis and in a letter to William Rothenstein of 1907 described him as 'the finest modern... Longings devour me to decorate a vast space with nudes and – and trees and water.'⁶⁴ John embarked upon his (later abandoned) *Lyric Fantasy* [fig.75] in 1909 but much of the work on it took place in 1913-14. This encompasses the period in 1912 that Sims was painting *The Wood Beyond the World* and provides an interesting comparison. Lisa Tickner acknowledges John's debt to Puvis, citing in particular a work of 1882, *The*

Pleasant Land, but argues that it is Puvis' influence that makes the picture 'look so old-fashioned.'⁶⁵ Given the wealth of modernist painters lauding Puvis' authority this conclusion would seem incongruous. On the contrary, John's response to Puvis would appear to site him more securely alongside his European peers Matisse, Signac, Denis et al, and certainly in terms of Binyon's essential, rhythmical lyricism, John's painting was both modern and traditional. Like Sims, John peopled his canvas with his own family - both living and dead - representing the scene as somehow symbolic of his personal life experience, but simultaneously of a more universal truth.⁶⁶ John placed his lovers and children in a remote, unspecific, but Southern landscape, and their clothing is recognizable as the bohemian Gypsy-like garb he and his family affected, as if to reinforce himself and his offspring as simultaneously contemporary and universal, the artist as progenitor of history. Sims, on the other hand, clothed his Madonna in her traditional ultramarine robe, confirming her sacred status; his youths and babes are nude, giving no hint of contemporaneity but alluding, in their chain-like formation, to a continuing relationship between figure and landscape. Even though we know that John referred to *quattrocento* painting, in particular to Piero's *Nativity*, his imagery is peculiarly secular – his land of fertile women and children is imbued with his own presence. Although Sims also used his own family as models, there is no sense of himself as progenitor; the repetition of the figures makes them types rather than individuals – the emphasis is not on their corporeality but rather their impalpability.⁶⁷

Both John and Sims portray a time and place other than the present. John's insistent depiction of lost loved ones anchors his scene in a yearning for times past – a Golden Age; Sims' detached repetition suggests a place familiar but never experienced and unattainable – a utopian idyll.⁶⁸ John wrote illuminatingly about the role of the artist as

‘an outsider... wandering off the beaten track... perhaps in a dream he has caught a glimpse of the Golden Age and is in search of it; everywhere he hits on mysterious clues to a lost world.’⁶⁹ Sims’ sentiments were more utopian and forward-looking, he wrote of imagining children ‘Happy, robust, well-cared-for, growing like flowers in a well-ordered world, where united commonsense provides for the necessities of life and keeps the machinery out of sight.’⁷⁰ Sims’ utopias and arcadias took on a variety of guises throughout his career – childhood, the pagan idyll, and now the sanctity of sacred paraphernalia – all were somehow removed from everyday lived experience.



Fig.75 Augustus John, *A Lyric Fantasy (The Blue Pool)*, c1913-14, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London

A comparison between *The Wood Beyond the World* and *Legend*, both depictions of enchanted forest clearings, reveals how Sims’ process of refining his compositions had developed over the two-year period. His preoccupation with magical woods and groves had started with his teenage forays into Epping Forest. His fantasies had begun to take the shape of religious experience, the *quattrocento* technique he adopted was appropriate to his new subject matter and became progressively obvious in the *Seven*

Sacraments series. Whilst the forest might be the main catalyst at this point, it would take tragedy in his personal life to lead the artist to the religious conclusions of the *Sacraments*. The experience of the Great War - his role as an official war artist and the death of his eldest son – would irrevocably influence his style and state of mind. The characters and themes he would grapple with would become evermore personal and increasingly rooted in the sacred rather than secular realm.

Leading up to the war Sims experimented with various arrangements of the ‘perfect picture’ he had described in March 1912. The formula based on nude, sky, tops of trees and the downs gave him the basic components of a group of paintings executed between 1912 and 1915. Several of these, *Iris*, *Anthea* [fig.76] and *Ianthe* (all 1915) contained a single nude figure supporting a large basket of fruit, flowers and *putti* on her head, her silhouette dissolving into the sky behind her.⁷¹ However he also executed more complex compositions, such as *Syrid and Pattatos*, 1914, [figs.77 and 78] and *The Basket of Flowers*, shown in the 1914 Academy. The first of these is an identical composition to *Spring Song* – a nymph flanked by a pair of *putti* against a low horizon. With *The Basket of Flowers*, however, Sims experimented with a two-figure composition – the girl bearing her basket and a small nude boy playing the pipe.⁷² His nymph - sometimes nude, sometimes draped - and her smaller companions dance towards the viewer; they are surrounded by sky and seem barely tethered to the strip of land visible at the base of the composition. These arrangements are reminiscent of Blake’s *Mirth*, [fig. 79] shown at the Tate in 1913, in which a semi-clad girl is surrounded by miniature dancers.⁷³



Fig.76 CS, *Anthea*, 1917, tempera and oil on canvas, Bury Museum and Art Gallery, Bury



Fig.77 CS, *Syrid and Pattatos* (photograph), archive GB3025/1/3/57



Fig.78 CS, *Syrid and Pattatos* (sketch), sepia ink on paper, archive GB3025/1/4/42



Fig.79 William Blake, *Mirth*, date and whereabouts unknown

In the same diary entry in which he extolled the attributes of the ‘perfect picture,’ Sims continued with the idea that, ‘a group of three figures is the ideal quantity... more will not enlarge one’s opportunities, and a single figure will not exhaust them.’⁷⁴ In the light of these comments it is interesting to look at decorative paintings such as *Trophy*, and *La Cage aux Amours*, both 1913, in which his nude-against-the-sky motif became positively architectural. The nude girls cluster back to back, supporting the burden above their heads and become living caryatids – classical statuary made of flesh and blood. This theme had of course been explored previously, in his *Fountain*, but here the sense is less of a spontaneous glimpse and more of timeless grace. These paintings are certainly geared towards a more decorative aesthetic – they read almost as *tromp l’oeil* panels – but at the same time are indicative of the artist’s increasing preoccupation with the elemental, with serenity and contemplation rather than riotous impulsiveness. His sketchpads of the period are full of Blakean sepia studies – stylised nudes and cherubs against the sky – explorations of the divine underpinning of nature.

At the same time Sims began to sketch out ideas for his *Seven Sacraments*. The *Sacraments* were his most overtly *quattrocento* inspired works. Here nature would be the backdrop to holy mysteries, not a catalyst to these events as previously. The emphasis on the landscape shifted from being an integral component to a marginal element, beyond immersion in the landscape itself, towards the emotional experience of worship. This, I will argue, was partly due to the Sims family’s relocation to London. Sims left his ‘terrestrial paradise’ during the War and was forced to find inspiration from more subjective, imaginative sources. His progression from the chaotic montage and overgrown thickets of *Legend*, through the essential utopian clearing of *The Wood Beyond the World*, to the glimpses of fields through the windows in the *Sacraments*,

suggests the idyll has been distilled to its core, the emotional resonance it conveyed. The next chapter will examine the War's effect on Sims' preoccupation with Christian imagery.

¹ Studio diary, December 1905, quoting from Goethe's *Faust*, first published in 1808.

² Ibid., February 26th 1911, p.40.

³ Ibid., August 17th 1910, p.34.

⁴ A commemorative photograph in the archive shows them posing with the Japanese delegates of the exhibition.

⁵ Laurence Binyon, 'E Pur Si Muove,' *Saturday Review*, 31st December 1910, p.840, and Sims' Studio Diary, September 30th 1910, p.36. Their common ideas also relate closely to Nietzschean discourse such as 'Art is the great enabler of life, the great temptress to life, the great stimulant of life.' 'Untimely Meditations III: Schopenhauer as Educator,' *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Viertes Stück: Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, 1874, p.692. See Malcolm Pasley (ed.) *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought*, London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1978.

⁶ Laurence Binyon, 'The New English Art Club,' *Saturday Review*, May 29th 1909, pp.683-4.

⁷ Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli: An Essay in Pictorial Criticism*, London: Macmillan and Co. 1913, p.17.

⁸ Laurence Binyon, 'The New English Art Club,' op. cit., p.684. Sims moved progressively closer towards this ambition from this point until the end of his life. It is crucial that the seeds of his *Spirituals* were sown before the war, and the paintings did not represent an abrupt break in his idiom but the logical development of his ideas.

⁹ Frank Rutter's obituary of Sims suggested that it was his interest in sacred imagery that led critics to believe that Sims was becoming mentally unstable: 'when... his mind... occupied itself with mystic Christianity and religious ecstasy, then immediately there were people... who hastened to exclaim that his mind must have become unhinged.' *Sunday Times*, Undated article, 1928, Tate Gallery Archive.

¹⁰ Ruskin's discourse emphasized the importance of 'the protests of vitality against mortality, of spirit against letter, and of truth against tradition.' E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, eds. *The Works of John Ruskin, Library Edition*, XXIV, London, 1906. As reproduced in Duncan Robinson, *Stanley Spencer*, Phaidon Press Ltd., 1990, p.16. Timothy Hyman, 'Stanley Spencer: Angels and Dirt,' in *Stanley Spencer*, eds., Timothy Hyman and Patrick Wright, London: Tate Publishing, 2001, p.12.

¹¹ Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli*, op. cit.

¹² When the comparison between Sims and Blake was made, its purpose was to deny Sims' alleged insanity. The rather short-lived argument was that Blake had visionary status, whilst Sims, using similar imagery was dismissed as mad. In 1915 for example he noted that, 'bidden to the choice between a Bastien and a Blake... the experienced would have Blake for his work offers ideas and the other but information,' furthermore that 'Bastien relates the common facts of a particular model. Blake particular aspects of a general life,' studio diary, January 7th 1915, p.81. The National Gallery held an exhibition of Blake's work in 1913 that included his series of woodcuts illustrating *The Pastorals of Virgil*, and the stipple engraving *Mirth and her Companions*, from Milton's *L'Allegro*. This engraving will be discussed in relation to later works such as *Spring Muse*, 1913 and *Syrid and Pattatos*, 1914.

¹³ John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p.141.

¹⁴ *Athenaeum*, undated review, 1911, (SSS p.81).

¹⁵ The composition is also reminiscent of a weather-house, in which small figures appear from one side or the other depending on whether sun or rain is forecast.

¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, undated review, 1911 (SSS).

¹⁷ Studio diary, op. cit., Feb. 26th 1911, p.40.

¹⁸ Undated review, 1911, SSS, p.81. Here we see clear evidence of Sims' eclecticism – he matches his style to the subject matter, in this case using two methods of applying paint in one image. As discussed in previous chapters this eclecticism was not personal to Sims alone. Philip Wilson Steer is another prime example of a British artist who tempered his methods depending on his subject.

¹⁹ It is unlikely that this was Sims' intention, far more plausible is that he chose a technique of painting naked children in sunlight that had been successful in his Arran studies.

²⁰ 'Fresh Crabbes ripe and redd,
Summer's Gift and Godlihead,
Shine the green leaves among,
Malkins! Shake them with a song,
In a ring, dance and sing
Fa la la'

As reproduced in a publication called the *Sport Courier* (date unknown, 1911) from a clipping in SSS, p.81.

²¹ *Nottingham Guardian*, undated (SSS p.83). Harold Speed, 'Charles Sims RA,' op. cit., p.52.

²² Agnes Sims records a visit to the Sistine Chapel on May 8th 1907, and to the Uffizi on May 14th.

²³ In a sketch for *The Shower*, now in the collection of Bury Museum and Art Gallery, Sims also included a rainbow. As in his *Fountain*, this alluded to a sense of transience but also illustrated the contrast between the rain and gloom of one half of the image and the sunlight of the other.

²⁴ *The Times*, May 21st 1912, p.10.

²⁵ Sims Studio Diary, op. cit., Sept. 26th 1910.

²⁶ Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli*, op. cit., p.54 and as cited in Hatcher, op. cit., p.172.

²⁷ When describing the process of painting *Julia* Sims explains how 'Semi-transparent washes with a sable brush give a creamy unity of surface' (Sims, op. cit., p.18). Here we witness an attempt, through the application of paint, to integrate figures of fantasy into a congruous whole with realistic surroundings.

²⁸ *The Times*, May 11th 1912, p.10.

²⁹ A scattering of reviews described it more favourably as 'didactic.' *Observer* undated review, 1911, (SSS p.82) and *Gazette and Echo* undated review, 1911, (SSS p.83).

³⁰ This interpretation of the draped female figure to the right and rear of the composition appears only in the *Manchester Guardian* review of the piece (SSS, p.81) and is not a conclusive reading. The figure is described elsewhere as simply a damsel in distress.

³¹ Undated review, 1911, (SSS p.82). Undated review, 1911, (SSS p.81).

³² L..... (indecipherable) (SSS p.83). Reviews of his second solo exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in April 1910 had commented on two works in particular. These were *Morning Corot-sur-Moy* and *Marish Flowers* (both 1909). The titles are overt references to the two artists whose works Sims was paraphrasing – Corot and Matthew Maris. Most of the reviews pick up on these pointers, it was accepted that Sims was mimicking other painters and, more importantly, that he acknowledged this in a mischievous stage-whisper. But with *Legend* and *The Shower* this eccentricity had become too extreme, the imagery was too fragmentary to read and the generalised titles did nothing to illuminate matters. His titles are interesting. Some have genuine literary and biblical references (see *Gentle Love...* and *Then Comes in the Sweet o' the Year* discussed later) whilst others are thinly disguised inventions. When working on *The Wedding of Sylvanus* (untraced) Sims openly refers to it as 'a plagiarism of Titian in watercolour,' Studio Diary, May 12th 1910, p.23.

³³ Musée des Beaux Arts, Lille. Sims described Gothic architecture in 1914 as 'the borrowed beauty of natural forms.' Sims Studio Diary, March 20th 1914, p.68. Elsewhere in *Legend* members of the cast of players include Albrecht Dürer's *St Jerome*, in the guise of the elderly hermit in the foreground, and Uccello's *St. George*. The white peacock (or phoenix) appeared in *Julia*, whilst the *putti* and couple on the left-hand side recur in later works. The rearing winged horse of classical mythology, Pegasus is present, and the maiden in the background is reminiscent of Ingres' *Stratonice* in *Antiochus and Stratonice*, as well as the numerous draped females who people the works of Puvis de Chavannes. She subsequently appears in various guises, both in the later pastorals and in *The Wood Beyond the World*.

³⁴ 'Dieric Bouts is the man!' Sims Studio Diary, January 20th 1912, p.43. This comment is in reference to Bouts' representation of types rather than individuals, with 'no attempt at absolute imitation,' in direct contrast to the 'tiresome... feverish imitation' of the Pre-Raphaelites. Ibid. Sims refers particularly to *The Long Engagement* by Arthur Hughes.

³⁵ The quotation is from *The Times*, undated review, 1911, (SSS p.79).

³⁶ As seen particularly in his watercolours between c1906-1909 such as *Tumble, Froth and Fun* and *The Swing*, both c.1906.

³⁷ Sims' preoccupations also echo the notes of such artists as Ferdinand Hodler, concerned with pantheism and the role of the artist as seer or visionary. For Hodler, 'the mission of the artist [was] to express the eternal element of nature, beauty, to emphasise this essential beauty. He enhances nature by intensifying objects; he enhances the shape of the human body, he gives us a magnified, simplified nature... which is commensurate with his experience, his heart and his mind.' Hodler, as cited in Sharon L. Hirsch, *Ferdinand Hodler*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1982, p.33. Hodler's paintings were fairly well known in Britain by this time, through, for example, reproductions in *The Studio* and other periodicals. Sims had also spent a month in Paris during the 1900 Exposition Universelle at which Hodler exhibited three major paintings, *Night*, *Eurhythmy*, and *Day*; which won the artist the accolade of a gold medal.

³⁸ John Hatcher, op. cit., p.140.

³⁹ Laurence Binyon, *Saturday Review*, June 6th 1908, p.720.

⁴⁰ Studio diary, June 12th 1912, p.48 and December 20th 1913, p.65.

⁴¹ Ibid., March 9th 1912, p.48.

⁴² For a discussion of this see Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p.57.

⁴³ 'When daffodils begin to peer, With heigh! The doxy over the dale, Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year' William Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale*, Act IV, Scene iii. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the month of Mary was the month of May. This was associated with the annunciation of the Virgin Mary, and most particularly with her song, the Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord; And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." New Testament, Luke 1:46-47.

⁴⁴ The most obvious connection is in the placement of the horizon. Whilst *The Coming of Spring* and *The Month of Mary* both have high horizons, about a quarter of the way down the canvas, *Then Comes in the Sweet o' the Year* is the reverse – the ground and therefore action is limited to the bottom edge of the work. This arrangement of figures placed against an expanse of sky was a popular technique of the time. See for example *The Top o' the Hill* 1901, a work in which Sims had explored the Impressionist and Barbizon school technique of recording atmospheric conditions – the *effet*.

⁴⁵ *The Coming of Spring* has the most prosaic and self-explanatory title, here Sims depicts his version of the *primavera*, which clearly relates to the Uffizi Botticelli. It is also clear that he is referring to Bouts (and similar Flemish masters) in the compositional groupings of the figures – see again *The Way to Paradise*, in particular the background figures winding their way up the hill. The lambs in *The Sweet o' the Year* are replaced by groups of children in *The Coming of Spring*. These groupings, and the composition in general are also reminiscent of Ford Madox Brown's *The Pretty Baa Lambs* 1851-59. *The Coming of Spring* was shown in the inaugural exhibition of the New Grosvenor Gallery in November 1912. This exhibition (including works by Lavery, Orpen, Cayley Robinson and Lambert) sought to show a collection of the best of contemporary British art.

⁴⁶ Whilst Sims had previously been preoccupied with portraying celebration in a pagan context, these paintings illustrate his growing fixation with religious iconography, in this case the festival of Easter. See *An Island Festival*, 1906, and the recurrent appearance of the Pan figure, a pagan god, in numerous earlier works.

⁴⁷ David Peters Corbett, 'Laurence Binyon and the Aesthetic of Modern Art,' *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2005, p.107.

⁴⁸ Studio diary, op. cit., March 15th 1912, p.46.

⁴⁹ Ibid., March 18th 1910, p.18.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ It has already been discussed how Sims' own slight disability led him to place great importance in physical perfection – his Arcadias, whether secular or sacred would be populated by perfect specimens of youthful humanity.

⁵² 1850, Collection of Tate Britain, London.

⁵³ As quoted in Alan Sims, Sims op. cit., pp. 112-3. John Sims recalls that an 1895 edition of Morris' *The Wood Beyond the World*, inscribed N. [Nan] MacWhirter was amongst his uncle Peter's effects sold in 2000.

⁵⁴ Puvis was also influenced by the Italian Primitives, particularly Piero.

⁵⁵ Augustus John was certainly inspired by Puvis in the conception of his *Lyric Fantasy*.

⁵⁶ Jennifer L. Shaw, *Dreamstates: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p.31.

⁵⁷ See Serge Lemoine (ed.) *From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso: Toward Modern Art*, London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002, p.284.

⁵⁸ This was shown at the inaugural exhibition of the Grosvenor Galleries in 1877, purchased by G. F. Watts and donated to the Tate Gallery in 1913 by Watts' widow.

⁵⁹ Works by Puvis de Chavannes such as *The Sacred Wood* 1884 and *Pleasant Land* 1882 were widely seen and influential. Painters such as Henri Matisse and Paul Gauguin made images of utopian landscapes such as Matisse's *Luxe, calme et volupté* 1904 and *Le Bonheur de vivre* 1905-6. Other earlier examples include Paul Signac's *In the Time of Harmony* 1894, and Henri Cross's *Evening Breeze* 1893.

⁶⁰ May 16th.

⁶¹ Alan Sims in Sims, op. cit., p.115. Sims' Madonna is also reminiscent of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, 1513-14.

⁶² *Sunday Times*, and *Evening Standard*, undated, (SSS).

⁶³ *Western Press*, undated, (SSS).

⁶⁴ Reproduced in Lemoine (ed.) op. cit., p.285 and by David Fraser Jenkins in *The Last Romantics* exh. cat., London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1989, p.71.

⁶⁵ Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, op. cit., p.70.

⁶⁶ John's wife Ida had died in 1907 and his son by his mistress Dorelia contracted meningitis and died in 1912.

⁶⁷ The four women are all versions of Agnes Sims, the prepubescent youths either (but not both) the thirteen year old John or eleven year old Alan, and the infants seem to have been modelled by Peter aged three although John Sims has suggested that some of them are recognisable as his uncle John, and so must have been worked from photos taken at the time of Sims' Arran paintings. These constant repetitions are also another point in common with Puvis' *Sacred Grove* - Suzanne Valadon was the model for all of his female figures - and add another layer of authenticity to Sims' search for a universal reality. By repeatedly painting close family members he reduces, or exalts them, to the role of icons thus removing them further from mundane reality and from the earthly ties of flesh and blood. This repetitive rhythmic pattern also evokes comparison to a primitive frieze which further enhances the sense that Sims is searching for a more authentic mode of expression than easel painting. The Sims family lived near to Bignor Roman Villa which boasted remarkably complete mosaic friezes, a possible influence. Agnes Sims recorded multiple trips to see the Roman ruins, an excursion that seemed to be a favourite family cycling trip.

⁶⁸ This relates to Morris' vision of a utopian, future land in his eponymous novel.

⁶⁹ Augustus John, 'I Speak for Myself,' *The Listener*, Sept 22nd 1949, as quoted in Tickner, op. cit., p.73.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Alan Sims, Sims op. cit., pp. 112-3.

⁷¹ See in particular the version of this theme entitled *Anthea*, now at Bury Museum and Art Gallery, in which the sky is rendered in the same hue as the girl's flesh, making her appear all but transparent.

⁷² This figure would later be used in the etching entitled *Over the Hills and Far Away*.

⁷³ This exhibition was reviewed in *The Times*, October 16th 1913, p.12.

⁷⁴ Sims, op. cit., March 9th 1912, p.48.

Chapter Four: The Great War

For the Sims family the war opened brutally and swiftly. Their eldest son John was killed in 1914. This tragedy has been recorded as occurring ‘at the Front’ but in fact was the result of a freak accident.¹ John was a junior member of the crew of HMS Bulwark, moored at Sheerness in the Medway. On November 26th the ship exploded, killing all but a dozen of the 800 or so men aboard.² John had celebrated his 16th birthday a month earlier.³ The family never fully recovered from this blow. Agnes Sims developed an interest in Theosophy and attended séance gatherings.⁴ Charles responded through his painting and writings. He radically overhauled his personal iconography and turned increasingly from the frothy paganism of the first decade of the century towards the brooding introspection of his late works. John’s death and the experiences of war have to be major contributory factors in the shift in Sims’ development, but not perhaps, the watershed often perceived. Alan Sims also attributed his father’s change in direction to the relocation of his studio from their Sussex home to London, St Paul’s Studios, Barons Court, W14 in May 1915.⁵ He claimed a change in perspective occurred with this move – no longer was Sims reacting to his ‘earthly paradise’ of Sussex, but was forced to seek more introspective inspiration.⁶ Although during and after the war Sims’ paintings appeared very different from the pre-war arcadias, this chapter will argue that, in fact, his continual search for an alternative to imperfect reality was merely intensified by the horrors he witnessed.

In 1913 Sims had embarked upon *The Muse of the Children*, which was completed and renamed *Clio and the Children* in 1915 [fig.81]. This painting would be the artist’s Diploma Picture, presented to the RA on his election as a Royal Academician in 1916.

Clio provides the viewer with a late glimpse at the pre-war Sussex landscape that had been so inextricably linked with the artist's personal arcadia. Back in 1913 when Sims was starting *Clio* he was also working on *La Cage aux Amours*, *Trophy*, and *The Little Archer*: all based around the themes of love; halcyon scenes of sunshine and nymphs and cherubs frolicking in the countryside – the 'summer before the war.' Also painted in 1913, and exhibited in the Academy of 1914 along with *La Cage aux Amours*, was *The Penitent* [fig.80]. Alan Sims has described this as 'the most noteworthy of all his work at the Academy that year' but it was 'tiny' and 'unnoticed.'⁷ *La Cage aux Amours* measured 6 by 4 ft whilst *The Penitent* was only 8 by 10 in, but here, 'in beauty of drawing it marked the highest level that he had yet attempted.'⁸



Fig.80 CS, *The Penitent*, 1913, tempera on panel, whereabouts unknown

This painting depicted a nude figure crouching on the steps of a cathedral whilst an angel bearing a chalice approaches from across a meadow. The background is recognizable as the Sussex countryside of works such as *Spring Muse* and *The Coming*

of *Spring*. This untraced painting is reproduced, rather poorly, in the Academy Pictures of 1914, but it is clear that the work was the forerunner to his *Seven Sacraments*.⁹ Sims would dispense with the rolling English landscape and simplify the figures in the later series, but the subject - an intensely spiritual experience – would persist.



Fig.81 CS, *Clio and the Children*, 1913 and 16, oil and tempera on canvas, Royal Academy of Arts

Sims repainted *Clio and the Children* before he allowed it to be exhibited in the Academy of 1916. The death of his son and the realities of war altered his perspective. He had embarked upon the painting as an optimistic allegorical illustration of the Muse of History, reading from her scroll to attentive children. By 1916 the scroll was defaced with a bloodstain and Clio repainted in an attitude of despair, no longer reading but bowed in sorrow. The allegorical content changed dramatically: no longer was this a conventional image of the continuity of history and learning with hope for the future,

for now the lessons of history have been ignored. The theatrical addition of the bloodstain insists instead that life could never be the same after the tragedy of war.

George Clausen's *Youth Mourning* [fig.82] was also shown in the Academy in 1916. It was assumed in the 1920s that both paintings were reactions to the artists' personal tragedies – the losses of John Sims and of Clausen's daughter's fiancé.¹⁰ Both paintings were also altered from their original states - however Sims altered *Clio* during the war (in this sense it is a direct reaction to John's death and the news filtering back from the Western Front) and this was the version shown in the Academy.¹¹ Clausen's alterations were retrospective: he painted out the war graves of his original 1916 version before it was presented to the Imperial War Museum in 1929, leaving one foreground crucifix to intensify the loneliness and sorrow of the figure and to reinforce the universal symbolism of the image. The background was turned into a crater-scarred and waterlogged battlefield, clearly intended to be Flanders or Northern France. Both artists used a figure or muse in a classical style to symbolize the allegorical component – History and Youth respectively.¹² In Clausen's final version 'Youth' mourns, with the benefit of hindsight, the loss of a generation of young men. Sims' 'History' despairs more immediately and personally from the depths of the Sussex countryside. In *Clio* there is a sense of the artist's personal bewilderment at the seemingly inevitable events unfolding around him – the children look on not at adult tragedy (which could have been represented by a contemporary reference) but at the accumulated horror of history.

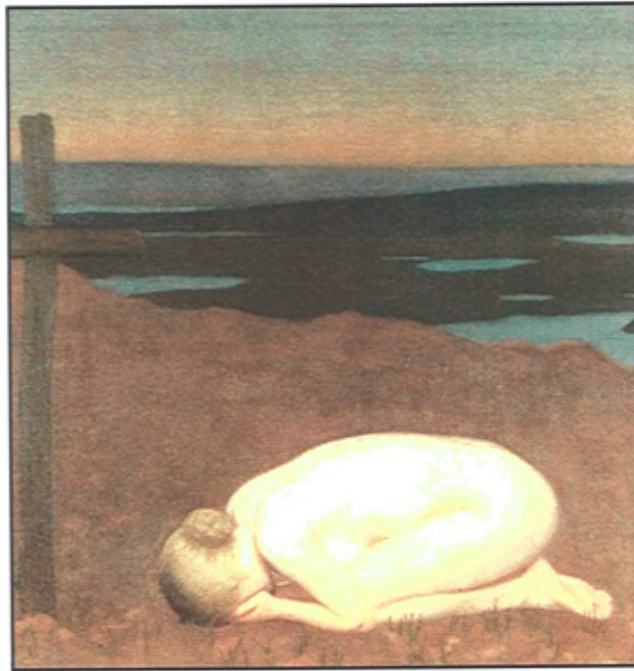


Fig.82 George Clausen, *Youth Mourning*, 1916, oil on canvas, Imperial War Museum. Presented by the artist 1929

For *The Nation*, Sims seemed conscious that this was ‘no time for romantic adventures in the Land of Fancy,’ suggesting that he had ‘neglected his fawns [*sic*] and pretty wanderers to try and weave with his brush a little fantasy of war.’¹³ The *Times* suggested that the figure of Clio spoiled an otherwise beautiful landscape, that she seemed ‘to be introduced from a sense of duty, as if the artist felt that he ought not now to be expressing his own natural enjoyment of pleasant things.’¹⁴ Reviewers were perhaps unaware of Sims’ tragedy and believed the image merely an attempt on his part to be topical. More significantly it also indicates that there was a difference between *Clio* and the type of work expected of Sims at that time.¹⁵

From his election as a Royal Academician in 1916 Sims found himself part of the cultural establishment to the extent that in 1919 and 1921 he was asked by *The Daily Mirror* to act as a judge in two of their national beauty contests, the ‘Beauty Competition for War Workers,’ 1919, and ‘British Girlhood Beauty Competition,’

1921.¹⁶ In 1916 he was commissioned to produce lithographic designs for London Underground posters, two of which were used.¹⁷ Both designs were concerned with the escapism – both physical and mental - made possible by taking a ride on the Tube. The first design [fig.83] was based on a rather unsuccessful painting of 1906, *The Land of Nod*, in which a cluster of pyjamaed children wend their way to bed through a cloudy skyscape. The image was based on (and in the lithographic version accompanied by) the Robert Louis Stevenson poem of the same title, first published in 1885.¹⁸ This poster was distributed to the troops at the Front, presumably as a morale-booster, to encourage nostalgia for the sanctity of home and nursery and to remind soldiers of what they were fighting to protect.¹⁹ Retrospectively, the painting seems an odd choice – overtly sentimental - but it apparently proved popular in minimizing ‘the harshness of barracks, billets and dug-outs.’²⁰ The second design Sims offered depicts one of his typically pastoral landscapes with hordes of nude infants and a classical shepherd [fig.84]. The title of the ‘station,’ *Arcady*, is presented in the traditional London Transport roundel, and accompanied by the invitation, ‘Alight here for Air, Sun, Winds, Flowers, Birds,’ all of which can be found only ‘15¼ miles’ from London. The Tube could take one away from the city and humdrum reality – for example to Kew Gardens or the zoo – as exemplified too by designs by Mabel Lucie Attwell, 1913, C. Sharland, 1911, and S. T. C. Weeks, 1913.²¹ The chosen subject matter of Sims’ posters retreated nostalgically to a previous idiom - the ‘summer before the war,’ and was, in fact, something of a regression for the artist, given that he had begun to move away from pastoral scenes before the onset of war.²²



Fig.83 CS, London Underground Poster design *The Land of Nod*, 1916, lithograph
 Header reads: 'The Underground Railways of London knowing how many of their passengers are now engaged on important business in France and other parts of the world send out this reminder of home. The drawing is the free gift of Charles Sims RA.'



Fig.84 CS, London Underground Poster design *Arcady*, 1916, lithograph, London's Transport Museum

Sims was continually aware of contemporary artistic developments in this period and kept abreast of current events and affairs. Agnes Sims recorded a continuous stream of theatre-going, trips to the cinema, foreign travel and concert parties, as well as their visits to galleries in her detailed social diary. In 1914 for example, they both attended the New English Art Club exhibition opening in January and the controversial Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition – *Twentieth Century Art, A Review of Modern Movements*. Sims was therefore aware of Wyndham Lewis' experiments with Cubo-Futurism, he viewed works by Roger Fry, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell and he was familiar with the early output of the young Stanley Spencer.²³ The work shown at the Whitechapel fell into four broad groupings identified by the catalogue as, respectively, treating 'common subjects in a sprightly manner... influenced by Sickert and Pissarro;' the second influenced by Puvis, Legros and John concentrated on 'imposing decorative design by the creation of commanding human types and appropriate attitudes and gestures.' The third group, largely comprised of members of the Bloomsbury Group, was influenced by Cézanne and built up their designs 'in volumes' and the fourth, including Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis, had 'abandoned representation almost entirely.'²⁴ The show was the culmination of a period of controversy surrounding the exhibiting of 'Modern Art' in this country but also the spring-board or catalyst for more overtly confrontational debate. For Lisa Tickner, the four groupings were not merely administrative categories but represented actual warring factions within British modernism struggling for supremacy.²⁵ She identifies the very diversity of the show as modern in itself, as, 'an evolutionary proliferation of species,' and that rivalry aside, the works exhibited had in common, 'the traffic... between a self-consciously radical approach to form... and pictorial resources drawn from the material and emotional conditions of modern experience.'²⁶ However different the end result, the painters were

all occupied with finding a new stylistic and pictorial language appropriate to the experience of living in early twentieth century Britain. *The Times* review was on the whole positive about these attempts, describing the show as ‘violently different from anything in the last century,’ and summed up the aim of the disparate elements as ‘an effort to make art no longer a parasite of reality.’²⁷ Sims’ own reaction to the show was to note that:

Post Impressionism is color [*sic*] independent of Nature, objects may be any color or tone subject only to a color pattern like a carpet or other arbitrary design. Since it is the appearance of a picture which is important, this is justifiable, no transcript of a real scene can equal in violence a color pattern founded on its form and meaning.²⁸

It is interesting that in the spring and early summer of 1914 both Sims and *The Times* reviewer used the term violent or violence to describe the effect of these modern paintings in a positive sense.²⁹ This emphasises Lisa Tickner’s notion of the exhibition as ‘rejecting the protocols and hierarchies of the past.’³⁰ Both Sims and *The Times* also accept the core of the show as a step further away from naturalism and recognize this as a positive move. For Sims ‘Post Impressionism’ was a generic description of most modern works – literally, after impressionism - however in this case it would seem that his use of the term applies to the decorative, semi-abstract experiments of the Bloomsbury Group. In his developing interest in the compositional effects of abandoning local colour for a more deliberately designed and intense palette it is evident that Sims had considered and absorbed aspects of contemporary artistic debate. David Peters Corbett has argued that it was the intrusion of the war that finally forced Sims to grapple with modernist principles, that until this point he had been content to churn out populist imagery merely to make money.³¹ Whilst it is true that much of Sims’ pre-War work was popular, it was during and after the War (the time when his experiments with modernism supposedly began) that he was at his most commercially successful and held in regard by the establishment.³² Sims’ studio diary from the period

from 1909 until around 1920, reveals a familiarity with and acceptance of certain common characteristics of modernist thinking throughout this time, not merely after the war. Aspects of his work – especially his *Seven Sacraments* - concur with elements of contemporary painting; in their extreme simplification of line and composition, but his attempts to find a language appropriate to wartime witness a deliberate recourse to *past* art, not an interaction with assertively up-to-the-minute principles at all. In 1917, Sims' friend, the critic P.G. Konody described his shift in outlook, 'the modern painter, whose passion was the study of atmospheric effects, and the play of direct and reflected light on the surface of the human body and on foliage, the animation and glitter of the sunlit, windswept world, has deliberately returned to the synthetic form, the simplified design, the decorative flatness, of the Italian primitives.'³³ Subject was too important to Sims for him to ever embrace the approach presented in the writings of Fry and especially Clive Bell, though he was sympathetic to certain examples of radical modernism - R. R. Tatlock later remembered Sims standing 'before a very advanced picture of a bursting shell,' saying 'I don't know what the fellow is driving at, and don't believe he does either; but he can paint alright' – nor was he to be persuaded by the aggressive dynamism of Vorticism.³⁴

In his choice of subject, emphasis on the figure and concentration on rhythmical fluency, Sims' preoccupations during the war might be allied to those of painters such as Augustus John, Stanley Spencer, Henry Lamb and William Orpen. For a brief time these painters all produced symbolic compositions of figures in landscapes, with a debt to Puvis de Chavannes and the Italian Primitives and an insistence on decorative composition. Painting such as this, with a reliance on the motif of elemental figures in simple, primitive landscapes, the juxtapositioning of contemporary dress and nudity,

and a symbolic or spiritual subtext, shares perhaps Binyon's impulse 'away [from] imitation, let us get to primal energies and realities,' but is also - to a degree - comparable to Gauguin's depictions of Tahitian natives and Breton peasants and Maurice Denis' Southern French spiritual and bacchanalian idylls.³⁵ A *Times* review in 1910 had called for 'a new Giotto' to 'arise and once more unite representation with expression.'³⁶ Sims, perhaps, was persuaded to allow his ideas of spirituality and, more specifically Christianity, to come to the fore, but by 1917 when his *Sacraments* were exhibited, it was assumed that the series was a direct response to the war, 'probably intended for a memorial,' and that it was no great surprise that Sims should have been the artist to tackle it, 'that a spiritual adventure of this kind should overtake an artist of true spontaneity in a moment of tension and crisis such as the world has never yet known would be natural enough,' said the *Daily Telegraph*.³⁷

The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church [figs.85-91] were painted between 1915 and their exhibition in the Dowdeswell Galleries in February 1917.³⁸ The series was not retrospective. It was Sims' challenge to discover an expression fitting to the experience of life *during* wartime. Amongst the backdrop of daily reports of the ever expanding lists of losses, the constant urging to join up and the unrelenting proof that this was the world's first use of technological warfare, Sims rejected the imagery of war itself. Nevinson's machine guns and vocabulary of technology and dehumanization were precisely what Sims sought to avoid.³⁹ Instead he adopted an intensely human voice and depicted the figure amidst the rites of passage structured by the Church and symbolic of universal experience. He took as his subject the existing ceremonies of the Seven Sacraments - ordained by the Roman Catholic Church to be God-given signs of an inward spirituality: *Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction,*

Orders and Marriage.⁴⁰ The Anglican Church dispensed with all but two of these (Baptism and Holy Eucharist) in order to separate the secular from the sacred, to distance the church from its involvement in every stage of the life of the individual.⁴¹ Sims' ecumenical approach employs elements from the ceremonies of both churches in his attempt to express something universal and essential. For Alan Sims, 'the ritual apparatus of both... provided symbols for the expression of spiritual realities beyond the scope of either. His "Holy Church" was not a political institution, but a realm of religious experience.'⁴² The *Church Times*, however, missed this important point in its review and quibbled over the inconsistencies of detail from one image to the next.⁴³

Of the seven paintings, four are interiors and the others exterior. Details of the surroundings - particularly the interior views of church architecture and decoration – are contrasted by the simple handling of the figures. Sims' scrapbook includes multiple photographs and postcards of church buildings, some with his own handwritten notes revealing an interest that dates back to his youth. Of particular interest in relation to the *Sacraments* are a photograph of the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey and another, unidentified, interior. Sims took architectural details from these and translated them into invented buildings in his series of paintings.⁴⁴ Except for *Orders* the interiors all open onto the countryside – sunlight pours in through windows and open doors and in *Penance* we even have a glimpse of a herd of cows in the field outside. Sims makes no attempt to situate his ceremonies in specific locations (unlike Stanley Spencer's Cookham) but the viewer is left in no doubt of the intended veracity of the scene. The Italian Primitives placed their sacred figures in their own surroundings – the fourteenth century Italian countryside. Stanley Spencer is said to have admired their 'nonchalant approach to the miraculous,' and Sims worked towards a similarly ingenuous view of spirituality – as

for example in *Extreme Unction*, where angels and last rites are juxtaposed with neatly lined up shoes and leaning books on the shelf.⁴⁵



Fig.85 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Baptism*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/1



Fig.86 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Confirmation*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/2



Fig.87 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Holy Eucharist*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/3

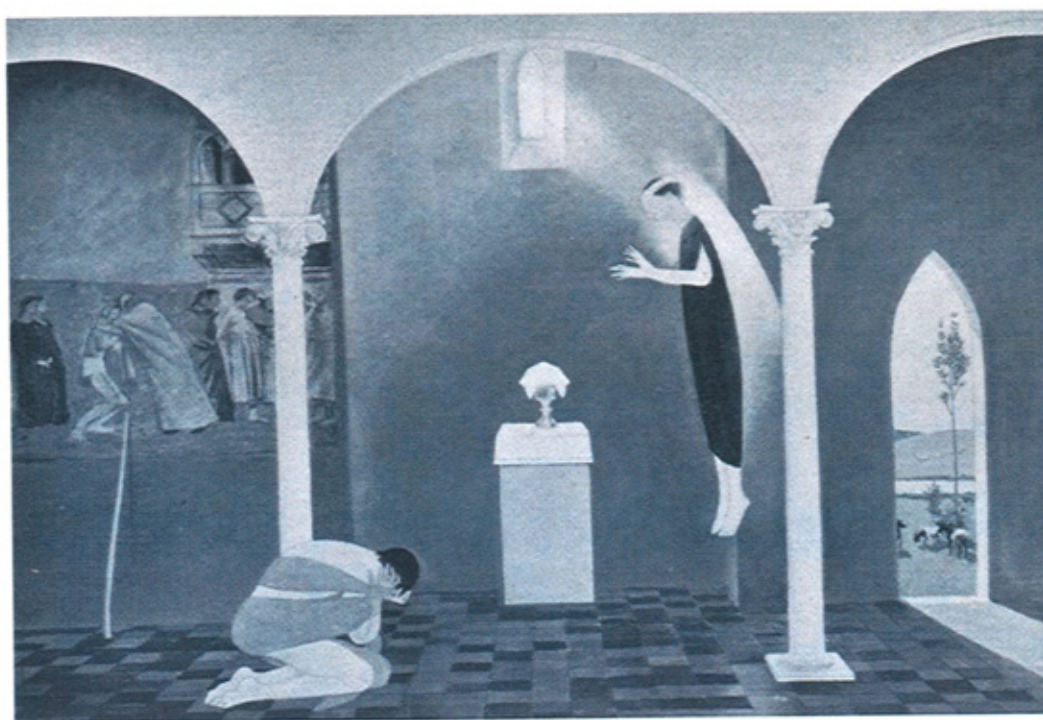


Fig.88 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Penance*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/4

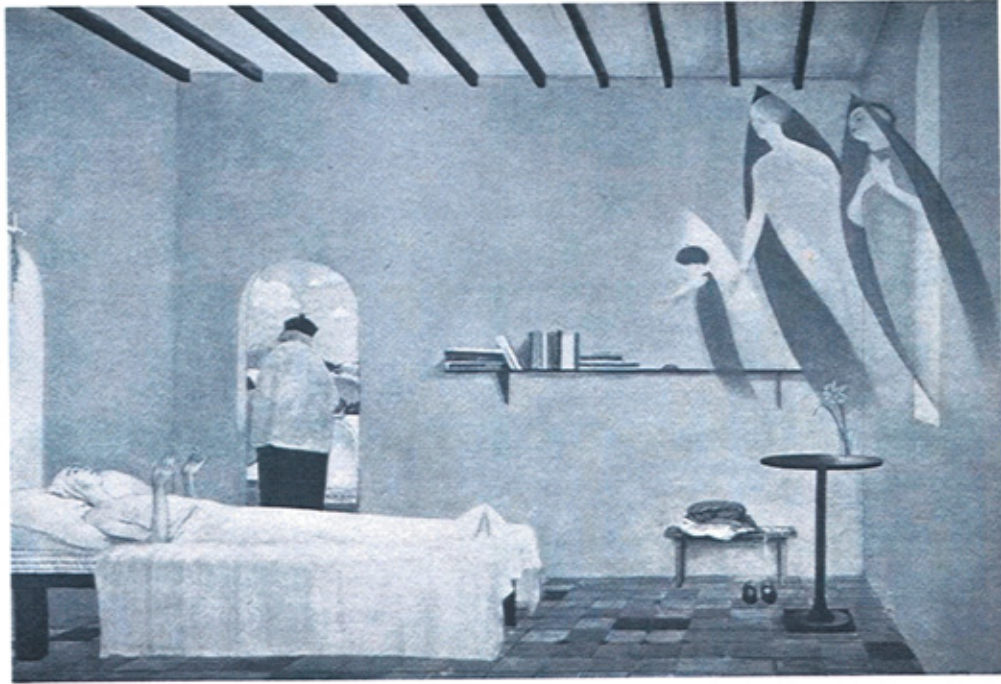


Fig.89 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Extreme Unction*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/5



Fig.90 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Orders*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/6



Fig.91 CS, *The Seven Sacraments of Holy Church: Marriage*, 1915-17, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/5/7

In the early years of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Dante Gabriel Rossetti had adopted the simplicity of the Italian Primitives and a spiritual subject matter that distinguished his work and led to the subsequent divisions within the Brotherhood. Long after his death the controversy and his influence were still debated. In a letter to the *Times* of 1910 the elderly William Holman Hunt had railed against Rossetti's perceived betrayal of the rest of the group: 'The spirit of his design was entirely apart from ours, nay, even antagonistic... Rossetti's was the revival of Quattro-Cento ideas.'⁴⁶ Rossetti's two early paintings, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* 1849, and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* 1850, were largely responsible for the assumption that the Brotherhood was a Papist group. Both were based on *quattrocento* principles, especially in terms of their 'enclosed composition with a glimpse of landscape behind.'⁴⁷ This and Rossetti's 'attempt to fuse physical reality' with spiritual experience were Sims' ambitions in his *Sacraments*.⁴⁸ Whilst Sims and Spencer (see for example his only slightly later *Christ Carrying the*

Cross, 1920) loaded their ceremonials with incongruous contemporary references, Rossetti had achieved the same sense of immediacy and relevance by using his own family as models for the holy figures and painting the landscape background in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* from life. The figures in Sims' *Sacraments* were deliberately not worked from the model: he argued that as painting techniques had become more sophisticated and as a greater illusion of reality was achieved the sense of religious awe and spirituality was lost, to be replaced with mere technical trickery.⁴⁹ By simplifying elements such as anatomy and perspective, he suggested, the modern painter could recapture something of the simple honesty of a primitive vision. He wrote of continuing 'the charcoal drawings for *Communion* and *Marriage* entirely without Nature, in an effort to find lines that bound the mood of a figure more than its exact form.'⁵⁰ Once again, the deliberate adoption of a specific technique in order to depict a particular subject matter demonstrated his increasingly considered approach to composition. The poses and gestures of the figures are also simplified and ritualistic. These are scenes of intense spiritual and emotional experience and communication is purely gestural. Sims wrote in his diary: 'Heaven is full of bright colours and radiant faces, perpetual and animated gesture, for where all is known there is no need of speech – exultation of movement is enough.'⁵¹ His increasing engagement with Christian doctrine is clear here, however the notes are also evidence of a growing concurrence with a modernist sensibility of pictorial composition.⁵²

Critical reception of the *Sacraments* – as reflected in the archive scrapbook - was positive. The paintings were designed as sacred objects, as icons or altarpieces and were created in tempera as some early frescoes had been and the reviews on the whole agreed that this was an ambitious project successfully carried out with minor aberrations. The

various critical comparisons made to the work of others are especially interesting. These range from Konody's 'Pier dei Franceschi [*sic*] and William Orpen' – a 'strange combination of the old and the new,' to an 'anthology of the early Florentines with footnotes by Conder and Beardsley.'⁵³ It was agreed that Sims was undoubtedly referring to the Italian Primitives but that the series also displayed understanding of modern technique, especially the type of lyrical symbolism already discussed. Konody's reference to Orpen points towards a comparison with his allegories, *The Western Wedding* and *The Holy Well* first shown in 1914 and 1916 respectively.⁵⁴ *The Holy Well* [fig.92] depicts a group of semi-clad and naked figures gathered around the base of a well on the west coast of Ireland. A monk is blessing the figures as they draw close to the water. The details of the scene are unclear. For David Fraser Jenkins the scene 'seem[s] to represent an expulsion from... paradise,' whilst there are also suggestions of a cleansing ritual, baptismal ceremony or even exorcism.⁵⁵ The peculiarly anthropomorphic crucifix in the background and monk with rosary beads signify Roman Catholic liturgy whilst the discarded clothing is characteristically contemporary. In this sense the painting can be read as an allegory of religion in Ireland in the early twentieth century. However obscure the allegory, Orpen has adopted a primitive idiom to represent the authenticity of this ceremonial. His *Western Wedding*, which, in a letter to Sims [fig.93], Orpen himself considered the better of the two paintings, was described by *The Studio* as 'upon a by-path of the fantastic,' and makes similar use of the generic landscape as backdrop to spiritual event.⁵⁶ Stanley Spencer's *Nativity* (1912) and *Zacharias and Elizabeth* (1913-14) are further examples of this impulse. Sims' recourse to a primitive style of painting was an attempt to depict universal spiritual and psychological truths more credibly and with greater intensity.



Fig.92 William Orpen, *The Holy Well*, 1916, tempera on canvas, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Sandy

My dear Sims
 It was my mistake and in
 song the "Irish wedding"
 which I think the best
 is in America. and can
 be got back at any time.
 The "Holy well" is sold and
 goes eventually to the Met.
 Museum New York.
 Thanks so much for all
 the trouble you are taking.
 Yours
 William Orpen
 Major attached General Staff I/D
 FPO A2 B.E.F.

Fig.93 Letter from William Orpen to CS, undated (wartime), archive

Alan, Sims' second and eldest surviving son, was baptized in June 1915, at the age of 14.⁵⁷ Shortly before Alan's christening Sims had remarked that, 'he would be a happy artist who should paint lovely altar pieces for poor chapels and be paid with the devotion of worshippers.'⁵⁸ The *Seven Sacraments* were the closest he would come to producing these altarpieces. There is no evidence to suggest that they were designed with a particular chapel in mind but the arrangement of the images was carefully worked out as if to suit ecclesiastical architecture. That the paintings were originally exhibited in an art gallery and not a church could represent a failure on Sims' part if we knew for sure that he had intended the latter. However, without this evidence it is more useful to regard the exercise as a successful attempt to introduce the sacred into a secular environment. If this were the case, then the series is perhaps another example of the artist's preoccupation with colliding worlds: fact and fantasy, animate and inanimate, natural and supernatural and now sacred and secular. Sims' specific wish to exhibit the series in a church was in fact granted posthumously when the *Seven Sacraments* hung in Thaxted Parish Church, Essex, between 1938 and 1942, where the artist's nephew, David Bickerton, was curate.⁵⁹

The *Times* review of *Clio* in 1916 had assumed that Sims' painting represented nothing more than an attempt to be topical, to engage with the imagery of war from a distance.⁶⁰ This assumption is understandable in the light of the type of work being exhibited at the Royal Academy at this time. It was felt that older artists showing work there were out of touch with the realities of modern warfare.⁶¹ As late as 1918, triumphalist charges such as Lucy Kemp-Welch's gung-ho *Forward the Guns!* [fig.94] were still being presented as representative of reality on the battlefield. To see the imagery of this particular war rather than rehashed and khakied scenes of the Boer War, the viewer would have to turn

to the next generation of painters, young men invalided away from the Front Line who had found a new visual language to describe their experience.



Fig.94 Lucy Kemp-Welch, *Forward the Guns!* 1917, oil on canvas, Tate Britain

Christopher Nevinson and Eric Kennington, exhibiting in the Spring of 1915 and April 1916 respectively, showed paintings of *their* war which made it clear that they believed that art had a new role. Romanticized tableaux of wounded soldiers tended by beautiful nurses made way for scenes of trench-life, of cold and terror, of daily atrocity and dehumanization. For critic A. Clutton-Brock 'the cubist method, with its repetition and sharp distinction of planes, expresses this sense of a mechanical process better than any other way of representation.'⁶² Nevinson's wounded men in *La Patrie* are a chilling vision of broken machine parts, the emphasis on the angular and repeat patterns removes any sense of humanity. The exhibition of Nevinson's images of the Front Line, and Kennington's later *The Kensingtons at Laventie* (April 1916) suggested that a record of this war should be kept for posterity and this resulted in the instigation of the government funded Official War Artist's scheme in which Sims was to play a part.⁶³

Sims' role took two forms. Firstly, in 1917 he was commissioned by Lord Rothermere under the auspices of the Canadian War Memorials Committee to produce a painting for their collection. *Sacrifice* of 1917 [fig.95], was Sims' contribution. In this the artist extended his recent preoccupation with Christian imagery, and further attempted to combine sacred iconography with reference to contemporary life. The result is an interesting if problematic amalgamation of influences. The first is the most iconic of Christian images – a crucifixion scene. Sims depicts a Christ figure crucified against a background divided horizontally into two; the top half showing soldiers in action on the battlefield, and the bottom a tableau of a grieving family. Sims depicts his own extended family in the role of this more generic expression of grief; his figures around the base of the cross represent the universal experience of loss in wartime.⁶⁴ The composition relies upon a sense of dislocation. It is arranged so that the battle scene is removed from the women, children and elderly left at home and separated by a band of gilt paint reminiscent of the sea.⁶⁵ The title's perhaps accusatory tone matched contemporary opinion that the young soldiers had been sent to their inevitable death by the cynicism and intransigence of world leaders. Sims provided what the Canadian War Memorial Committee had commissioned – a war memorial first and painting second. The oddly compartmentalized structure and self-conscious formality of the dominant regimental badges detracts from the human aspects of the composition. The figures appear fixed and prone, elements of a design or a type rather than portraits of individuals. Far more successful than the Canadian picture is the small panel that Sims had included in the Academy show of the same year. *Greater Love Hath No Man* [fig.96] illustrates his interest in a crucifixion motif earlier than *Sacrifice*.⁶⁶ In this, the Christ figure is replaced with a wounded soldier in contemporary 'hospital garb' as one of the reviews put it, flanked by his family.⁶⁷ The imagery is rather trite and the allegory obvious but

Sims' concentration on the individual faces of the figures and the use of his own family as models provides additional pathos. The majority of the contemporary reviews agreed that the painting had 'a genuine nobility and charm,' it seems that the small scale of the panel concentrated an atmosphere of contemplation, in contrast to the overblown statement of the Canadian version.⁶⁸

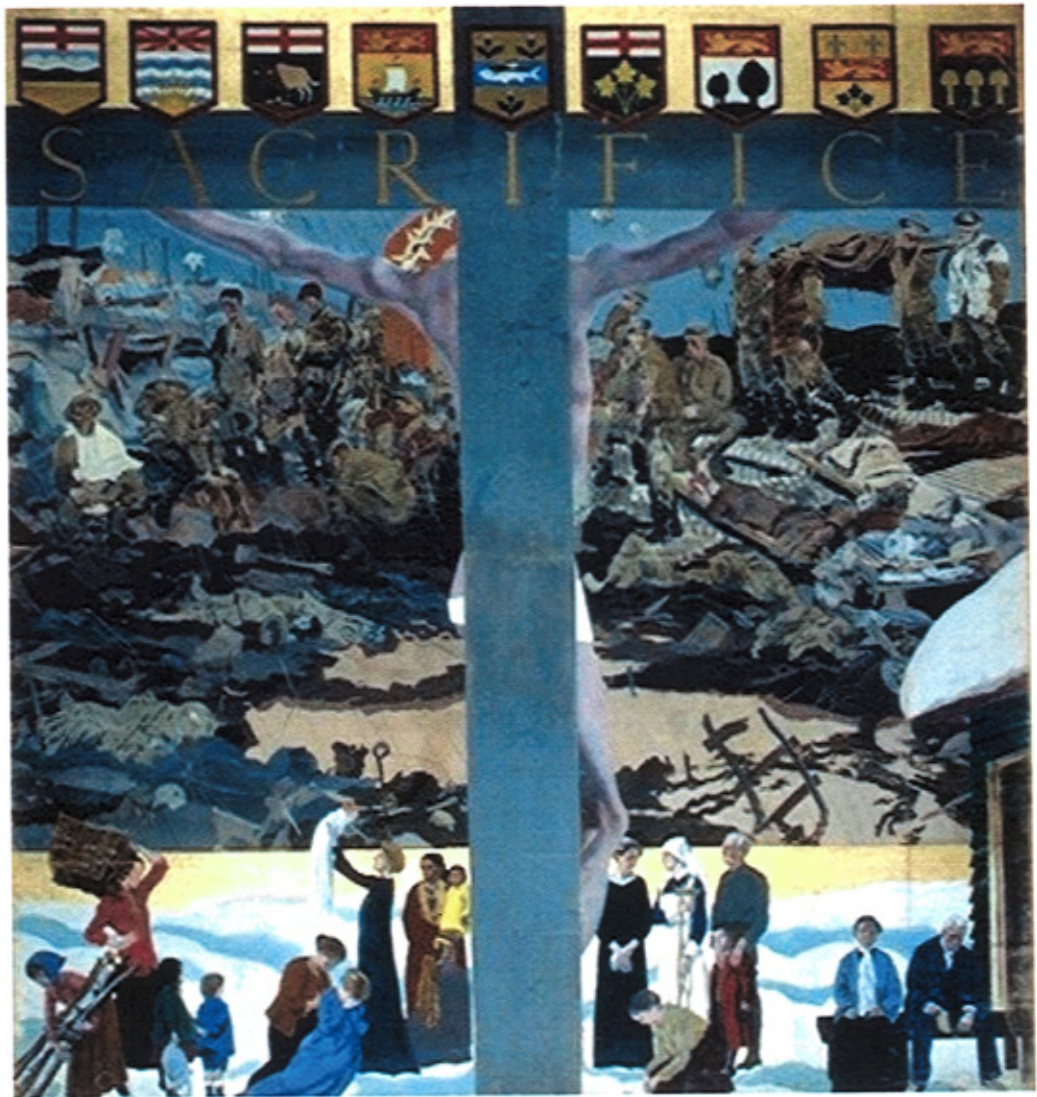


Fig.95 CS, *Sacrifice*, 1917, tempera on canvas, Canadian War Museum



Fig.96 CS, *Greater Love Hath No Man*, 1917, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph archive GB3025/1/3/82

The contemporary rumour of a Canadian soldier crucified on a barn door by German soldiers could possibly be cited as an influence on *Sacrifice*.⁶⁹ But there is no proof that Sims was aware of this, he may have been merely extending the preoccupation with Christianity displayed in his *Sacraments*, and the existence of *Greater Love* points towards this conclusion. A review of the latter also remarks upon the wealth of images of crucifixes in the Academy of 1917, the year Sims travelled to France to collect material for *Sacrifice*.⁷⁰ However another work, *Canada's Golgotha*, a bronze by the sculptor Derwent Wood, showed a similar scene and was also exhibited in the Canadian War Memorial Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1919.⁷¹

Sims' second official commission was in 1918 when he travelled to France under the instructions of the War Artists Scheme. Sims' contact at the Imperial War Museum was Alfred Yockney, the ex-editor of the *Art Journal* and man appointed to oversee the

scheme.⁷² Sims was meant to have left for France in September 1918, but his departure was delayed until late October by bureaucratic problems including the state in which the previous artist, Henry Tonks, had left the official car.⁷³ Colonel Lee, the soldier responsible for overseeing the artists' arrival and requirements in France, remembered Sims as 'nice, quiet, and rather strange, inclined to fuss about the cold and the fact that his chauffeur had run out of wash-leathers.'⁷⁴ This is often quoted in passing reference to Sims, as if this 'strangeness' was evidence of the alleged mental illness that caused his eventual suicide.⁷⁵ Undoubtedly eccentric, even obsessive, but sane or otherwise, Sims' fussing about the cold was surely justified given he was expected to work *en plein air* in Northern France in November.⁷⁶

During his time in France Sims made small oil studies on sketching boards designed to fit in the lid of his paint box. There are many examples of these sketches in the archive which are evocative *plein air* landscape scenes [see **figs.97-99**]. These are direct, concise and genuinely seem to speak in Sims' voice and are particularly suggestive of standing in the cold on the deserted battlefield. The marks he has made convey the sense of desolation. In places the surface of the paint is scratched by abrupt pencil strokes, in others it is daubed on crudely and reminiscent of the fractured landscape surrounding him. However the commission was such that the scale of the finished canvas had been stipulated - the sketches were scaled up to a 'Uccello' size format and consequently lost much of their power to communicate the atmosphere and pathos of the original experience.⁷⁷ Like *Sacrifice*, the *Old German Front Line* suffered from a stilted quality common to designs squared up to an inappropriate size.



Fig.97 CS, *War Study*, oil on wooden panel, 1918, archive GB3025/2/11



Fig.98 CS, *War study*, oil on wooden panel, archive GB3025/2/12



Fig.99 CS, *War study*, oil and graphite on wooden panel, archive GB3025/2/13



Fig.100 CS, *The Old German Front Line at Arras, 1916*, tempera on canvas, 1918
Imperial War Museum, London

Sims was instructed to work around Arras on the old German front line, on the theme of Autumn. Despite the difficulties in its execution and the greater power of the earlier sketches, *The Old German Front Line, Arras, 1916* [fig.100] is an impressive, indeed overwhelming painting. A combination of the large format and intensely consistent attention to detail makes it an uncomfortably realistic image. Sims included no human or even animal life in the composition, although he had made sketches of soldiers – now in the archive [fig.101]. This adds to the sense of desolation, the landscape left behind after the war had moved on. Sims stayed in France for the first three weeks of November 1918; he was collecting material for his commission at the very end of the war, during the Armistice signing. He painted military debris and broken down walls poking up through a fresh covering of snow – similar to some of Orpen's war pictures such as *Dead Germans in a Trench*, and John Nash's *Over the Top*, both 1918 - a sense of time passing but never obliterating what the land had witnessed. The sunlight and road through the middle of the scene draws the viewer's attention towards the town still standing in the background – a symbol of civilization despite the odds. The caption accompanying the reproduction of this painting in Sims' book reads, 'All landscape is weather.'⁷⁸ But the fallen snow here both obscures and highlights the traumatic upheaval wrought on the landscape, the intervention of transient (in)humanity; his panorama is of a landscape broken by war and abandoned.

By the time Sims painted *The Old German Front Line at Arras* he had seen Orpen's exhibition of war paintings at Agnew's, he was familiar with Paul and John Nash's landscapes and he had viewed Kennington's drawings at the Leicester Galleries.⁷⁹ Whilst he was gathering material in France in November 1918 the war came to an end. *The Old German Front Line* can therefore be viewed as the first of Sims' post-war paintings, an image of the chaos left in the wake of battle. Paul Nash, whom Sims was soon to know well, described the war as an 'immense intervention,' and as Samuel Hynes remarked later 'no-one after the war... could ignore its historical importance or frame his thought as though the war had not occurred, or had been simply another war.'⁸⁰ The war represented a break in contemporary cultural thought, and, it has been argued, a necessary catalyst to prompt the return of emotional rather than purely cerebral work in European visual and literary culture. Reaction to familiar surroundings and stimuli appeared more appropriate than cool abstract analysis. The immediate post-war years witnessed a rash of intensely emotional autobiographical war memoirs and poetry, and Paul Nash further identified a 'revival of the English tradition' which included a renewed interest in the pastoralism of Blake and Palmer, filtered partly, of course, through Binyon.⁸¹ Binyon's *The Followers of William Blake* was published in 1926, the same year as the V&A exhibition *Drawings, Etchings and Woodcuts by Samuel Palmer and other Disciples of William Blake*. Artists were drawn to Blake and Palmer's techniques and subject matter – Graham Sutherland produced a series of Palmer-like etchings in the 20s such as *Pecken Wood*, 1925. Paul Fussell has described the impulse to return to the pastoral as 'an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them.'⁸² The English landscape took on anthropomorphic associations. To record and preserve the landscape was also to express a certain nostalgic sense of Englishness, of patriotism.

Paul Nash's canvases of raped and desolate battlefields – such as *The Menin Road*, 1919 – allowed him to express his horror at the atrocities enacted and experienced by civilized humanity. For Andrew Causey, the landscape was a filter to Nash – it allowed him 'to realize his own feelings in the unprecedented situations in which he found himself by studying and reproducing the effects of war on nature.'⁸³ The importance of the landscape and particularly the English landscape in the immediate aftermath of war extended that pre-War impulse to retreat from modern reality towards escapist salvation.⁸⁴

Sims' immediate response to this impulse was his short-lived return to the fairyland of his youthful paintings. *And the fairies ran away with their clothes*, [fig.102] his contribution to the Academy of 1919, illustrates a mother and child sitting on a riverbank gesturing towards a group of miniature fairies making off with their discarded clothing. The photographs of Agnes and Alan that he used to work from here [figs.103-4] date from Alan's babyhood, the early years of the century, a time of halcyon existence and his first commercially successful series of paintings set on Arran. It is understandable that after the trauma of war and John's death Sims should wish to return to a happier time, both in terms of his chosen subject matter and the light impressionistic brushwork he adopted in this painting, [see studies, figs.106-8] particularly evident in the colour sketch of the whole composition [fig.107] where the swirls of pigment and dappled light evoke the flurry of wings. The painting is not perhaps, a purely personal aberration – but coincides with a more general revived interest in the supernatural as witnessed by the incident of the 'Cottingley Fairies' whereby two children in a Yorkshire village reputedly photographed fairies.⁸⁵ The war created the necessity for a belief in something other than natural human experience. In

this sense Sims' innate preoccupation with retreats and arcadias, the search for an alternative to material existence demonstrated throughout his career, continually coincided with more widespread impulses. His London Underground posters offered escape from the city to a *hortus mentis* – garden of the mind, his *Sacraments* encouraged respite from everyday reality to the realms of spiritual truth. After the bitterness of *Clio* and the detached panoramic documentary of the destroyed landscape of *The Old German Front Line*, he retreated deeper within the rural idyll with *And the Fairies*.⁸⁶ In this pocket of English countryside, despite the upheaval wrought all around it, one might still glimpse creatures from another life – both from the world of fantasy, and, more particularly in this case, from the world before the war.



Fig.102 CS, *And the Fairies Ran Away with their Clothes*, 1919, oil and tempera on canvas, Lotherton Hall, Leeds City Art Galleries



Fig.103 Photograph of Alan Sims, c1903, archive GB3025/1/3/18



Fig.104 Photograph of Agnes Sims, c1903, archive GB3025/1/3/21



Fig.105 CS, Study for *And the Fairies Ran Away with Their Clothes*, c1919, oil on primed paper, archive GB3025/1/4/64

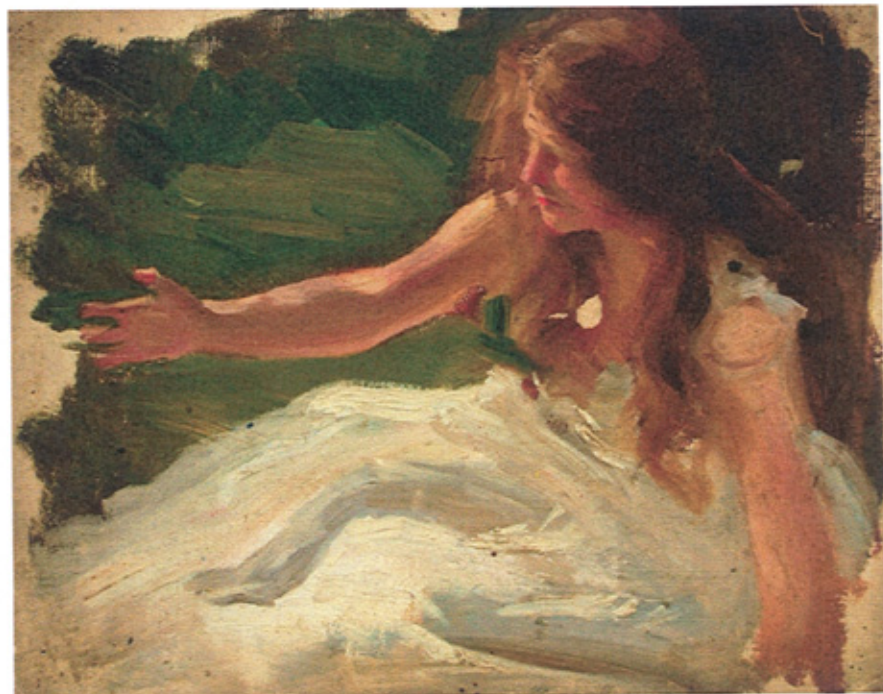


Fig.106 CS, Study for *And the Fairies Ran Away with Their Clothes*, c1919, oil on primed paper, archive GB3025/1/4/63



Fig.107 CS, Study for *And the Fairies Ran Away with Their Clothes*, c1919, oil on primed paper, archive GB3025/3/63

Alan Sims believed that his father's experiences during the war were directly responsible for his suicide ten years later. The last decade of his life witnessed Sims' most apparent acceptance by and involvement in the establishment. He became Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools in 1920 and in 1922 submitted a portrait to the summer show that was hailed as the Picture of the Year. He exhibited successfully in New York and Pittsburgh and developed a name for his fashionable society portraiture. In 1923 he was commissioned to paint King George V. But the critical and public reception of this painting marked the end of Sims' career as an establishment figure – he fled to America and resigned from his post at the Academy. Throughout this period his commercial success had masked domestic problems and his increasing alienation from Agnes and his sons.⁸⁷ The next chapter will examine his preoccupation with portraiture and

decorative painting and his attempts to find a visual language appropriate to post-war Britain.

¹ Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Barbican, 1994, p.129. Cork's information about Sims' life includes several other inaccuracies, for example that the children in *Clio* were 'probably based on Sims' own sons and daughters,' p.129.

² *The Times* reported the explosion and quoted Winston Churchill's announcement to the House of Commons, it was believed that the cause of the accident was 'an internal magazine explosion.' *The Times*, November 27th 1914, p.9. John Sims was one of six navel cadets named as lost in *The Times* on November 28th p.5. Due to the nature of the explosion and the speed with which the ship went down many of the 700 or so lost were not identified.

³ See Agnes Sims' diary, October 17th 1914.

⁴ As did many others during this period. Two episodes of widespread belief (or readiness to believe) in the supernatural during the war years were The Angel of Mons and the Cottingley Fairies. Paul Fussell has described how the first legend was based on known origins: '[it] developed from a short story which mentioned no angels at all. On September 29th 1914, Arthur Machen published in the *Evening News*... "The Bowmen," in which the ghosts of the English bowmen dead at Agincourt came to the assistance of their... countrymen... Described these bowmen... as a "long line of shapes, with a shining about them."' Fussell explains that it was the word 'shining' that ignited the popular imagination and that 'within a week Machen's fictional bowmen had been transformed into real angels... he was assured, especially by the clergy [that] the angels were real and had appeared in the sky near Mons. It became unpatriotic, almost treasonable, to doubt it.' Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp.115-116.

⁵ The family had moved to Sussex in 1906, firstly to Fittleworth and then Lodsworth. The surrounding landscape and sense of belonging had proved a great source of inspiration to Sims during this period in his career. David Peters Corbett has suggested that the move to London signified a deliberate attempt on Sims' part to experience an urban environment more suitable to contemporary events than idyllic Sussex. See David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art 1914-30*, op. cit., pp.202-3. This is a possibility, but far more likely is that the family (and particularly Agnes) decided that relocation to London would be more convenient and allow them easier access to social events. The first mention of house-hunting in Agnes' diary was as early as April 1914 although the move didn't occur until a year later.

⁶ Alan Sims in Charles Sims, *Picture Making*, op. cit., p.119.

⁷ Alan Sims op. cit., p.117.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ There is also a photograph of the painting in the archive.

¹⁰ See Richard Cork, op. cit., p.129. Cork refers to a letter in the Imperial War Museum files from Charles Aitken to Blaikey, 6th December 1929, in which Aitken makes the suggestion that Clausen's *Youth Mourning* was a reaction to the death of his prospective son-in-law.

¹¹ By 1916 conscription was introduced in the British Army to swell the dwindling ranks. The defeats at Mons (August 1914) Ypres (October 1914 and April 1915) and Loos (September 1915) had cost a total of some 150,000 men. For a more detailed account, see Fussell, op. cit., pp.8-13.

¹² These generic female figures root the imagery in the tradition of Western iconography: they refer to past art which intensifies the familiarity and universality of the images. They are also heavily indebted to the type of figure used by Puvis de Chavannes in his symbolist landscapes.

¹³ 'N.N,' 'The Royal Academy,' *The Nation*, Vol. 104, Issue 2713, June 28th 1917.

¹⁴ *The Times*, Saturday, April 29th 1916, p.6.

¹⁵ In 1917 Sims returned to the theme of *Clio* with *Remembrance*. This large painting (48"x 72") was exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery along with a portrait of Peter Sims and a work called *Prayer*. *Remembrance* shows a group of mourning women, two young and two older, presumably meant to illustrate two generations – wives and mothers. Like the protagonists in *Clio* they are situated in a field with a wide vista to the countryside behind. On the right hand side of the composition is a tree or large bush from which the ghostly apparitions of two male figures appear. Although the imagery in *Remembrance* errs towards the ridiculous, the style, particular in the case of the ghosts/angels, is an indication of the artist's continuing preoccupation with Giotto's technique, which he had exploited most fully in his *Seven Sacraments* series.

¹⁶ Sims was photographed sitting amongst a group of the entrants described as a 'bevy of beauty.' *Daily Mirror*, page and date unknown (SSS).

¹⁷ Agnes records him going to make the lithographs on March 22nd 1916.

¹⁸ *The Land of Nod*, Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Child's Garden of Verses XVII,' *Ballads and Other Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Child's Garden of Verses; Underwoods; Ballads*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.

¹⁹ See Harold F. Hutchison, *London Transport Posters*, London: London Transport Board, 1963. p.21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Although of course here the imagery took the form of an advertisement. An interesting and rather anomalous painting of around this same period was the undated *Infantry on Manoeuvres*, in which we see the Italianate landscape and gangs of toddlers of *The Wood Beyond the World*, here with no adults, and with the rather dreadful pun in the title that refers obliquely to the war. This painting is not listed in Sims' Studio records which cover 1895-1917. This is not conclusive as the records are not infallible, sometimes works are listed under different names, in this case it would seem safe to assume that *Infantry on Manoeuvres* dates from between *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1912, and the end of the war. The only possible listing in his records is a painting of late 1914 entitled *On the Shore*, which he notes was sold to a R. Haworth of Blackburn for £150.

²³ As we know, Sims had also attended Roger Fry's *Post-Impressionism* exhibitions of 1910 and 1912.

²⁴ *Twentieth Century Art: A Review of Modern Movements*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, May 8th – June 20th 1914, exhibition catalogue, pp.3-4. These have been retrospectively identified by David Fraser Jenkins as the Slade School Symbolists, the Bloomsbury artists, the Camden Town Group and the Vorticists. See David Fraser Jenkins, 'Slade School Symbolism' in *The Last Romantics, The Romantic Tradition in British Art: Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer*, London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1989, p.71.

²⁵ See the introduction to Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects* op. cit.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

²⁷ *The Times*, May 8th 1914, p.4.

²⁸ Sims Studio Diary, June 21st 1914. Clive Bell's *Art* which was published in March 1914 also makes use of the carpet analogy in its discussion of 'significant form.'

²⁹ Wyndham Lewis' experimented with a Cubo-Futurist style that he called Vorticism. His paintings from the early part of 1914 anticipated the imagery of warfare and used militaristic titles. See for example his *Plan of Campaign*, an abstract design based on a military diagram of the arrangement of troops.

³⁰ Tickner, op. cit., p.8.

³¹ David Peters Corbett, op. cit., pp.202-3.

³² Elected a Royal Academician in 1916 and made Keeper in 1920, Sims' professional interaction with that bastion of traditionalism, the Academy, coincided with the time that according to Peters Corbett he had abandoned his preoccupation with 'financial and academic success' and accepted that interaction with aspects of modernity was necessary in order to understand and survive post-war England. (Ibid., p.202).

³³ P. G. Konody, 'Art and Artists: Mr. Charles Sims,' *Sunday Observer*, February 4th 1917.

³⁴ R. R. Tatlock, *Daily Telegraph*, April 18th 1928, (page number unknown, cutting from Tate Gallery Archive).

³⁵ See for example Denis' *April* of 1892.

³⁶ *The Times*, July 11th 1910, op. cit.

³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, February 1917, SSS, p.114. *Daily Telegraph*, February 1917, SSS, p.114. The *Telegraph* also suggested that the contemporary artist most qualified to execute the project would have been Denis who had experimented with decorative paintings for church interiors since the 1890s and was known for his preoccupation with Christian imagery and the amalgamation of reality and spirituality, *Daily Telegraph*, SSS, p.114. An example is his *Catholic Mystery* of 1889 in which a vision is made flesh in an ordinary house, complete with net curtains. Denis includes a lily in a pot on the windowsill as a symbol of the Virgin and though the figures are haloed he teases the viewer with the implication that this is just a trick of the light as seen on the heads of the acolytes. There are two versions of this painting that date from 1889, another in 1890 and another in 1891. I am referring to the smaller and presumably earlier of the 1889 pair. See the 1994 collaborative catalogue *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, Réunion des musées nationaux / Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, 1994, pp.125-129.

³⁸ The catalogue lists the seven finished paintings in order and also that a sketch was shown depicting Sims' design for an altar screen incorporating all seven. It is clear that their liturgical arrangement was an integral aspect of the design – he intended them to function in a sacred setting. David Peters Corbett mistakenly dates this exhibition as having taken place a year later, in 1918. (See Peters Corbett op. cit., pp.203-4). He therefore treats the series as a retrospective look back over four years of warfare and compares them to post-war paintings. It is crucial that the *Seven Sacraments* were conceived and embarked upon as early as 1915 as we know from Sims' Studio diary – he mentions working on the charcoal sketches for *Communion* and *Marriage* on April 10th 1915. Eric Gill's *Stations of the Cross* for Westminster Cathedral were also conceived and created during the Great War, commissioned in 1914, they were completed in 1918.

³⁹ Christopher Nevinson's *La Mitrailieuse* (Machine-gun) 1915, was first shown in March 1916 at an Allied Artists Association exhibition. His war paintings insisted upon the depiction of the physical effects of modern warfare – man became dehumanised, part of the machine of warfare. Sims chose instead to concentrate on the emotional effects. His own slight disability had previously led him to dwell upon physical perfection. It is possible that his exploration of religious experience and divine imagination was a logical progression from this – if a contemporary depiction of the human body must allow mutilation and imperfection it would be a reasonable alternative to escape to the mind.

⁴⁰ Poussin's version of the *Seven Sacraments*, which Sims may have seen, was part of the Bridgewater Collection housed in Bridgewater House, overlooking Green Park, London.

⁴¹ This separation was also prompted by a resentment felt towards the financial demands placed by the Roman church. Parishioners were levied at significant occasions (such as the seven mentioned) – the

taxes collected from all over Europe were all directed towards the central power in Rome. A reduction of the Church's influence on everyday life would also mean a reduction in the amount of money paid.

⁴² Alan Sims in Sims, op. cit., p.121.

⁴³ 'The golden vestments are most effective, but the liturgical details are inaccurate... the combination of Gothic vestments and no apparels on alb or amice suggests a particular part of France late in the fifteenth century, but other things do not agree. Presumably it is the Roman and not the English rite that is shown, but if so, why has the woman in the 'Eucharist' picture a chalice in her hands?' As cited by Alan Sims, *ibid.*, p.121.

⁴⁴ See in particular *Confirmation and Penance*.

⁴⁵ Fiona MacCarthy, *Stanley Spencer: An English Vision*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, p.13.

⁴⁶ William Holman Hunt, letter to the *Times*, May 28th 1910, p.13.

⁴⁷ John Nicoll, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, London: Studio Vista, 1975, p.51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁴⁹ See Sims op. cit., p.122.

⁵⁰ Sims' studio diary, April 10th 1915, p.91.

⁵¹ Sims' studio diary, January 3rd 1915, p.80.

⁵² Clive Bell's book *Art* had been published in March 1914. This had been the first time that his term 'significant form' had been used. Bell and Roger Fry's version of modernism concentrated on form over content or narrative. Sims' *Sacraments* definitely contain a narrative element and cannot be described in Fry's terms, however his growing preoccupation with the method of painting and of reducing the narrative to its most elemental agrees with aspects of contemporary thinking.

⁵³ Konody uses the Latin version of the more familiar Italian, Piero della Francesca, P.G.Konody in the *Observer*, SSS, p.114 and *Manchester Guardian* op. cit.

⁵⁴ *The Holy Well* was included in the 1916 New English Art Club exhibition. Agnes Sims records their visit on June 1st.

⁵⁵ David Fraser Jenkins, op. cit., p.73.

⁵⁶ Letter from William Orpen to Sims, 1921 (date indecipherable). 'Studio-Talk,' *The Studio*, Vol. 63, No. 262, January 1915, p.294. Correspondence between Sims and Orpen held in the Northumbria archive is proof that Sims admired the *Western Wedding* and, in 1921, when a member of the selection committee for the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest, he had wanted it to be purchased for the Tate. This didn't happen and the painting was sold to Japan.

⁵⁷ According to John Sims, confirmation at 14 was standard practice at Rugby, where Alan was at school. When it was discovered that he hadn't yet been baptized, he had to be hastily 'done' in order to allow the confirmation ceremony to go ahead. The artist had been an active member of his local church since moving to Sussex in 1906, both in Fittleworth and latterly in Lodsworth; however in his youth Sims had been far more interested in more rebellious forms of spirituality, in particular paganism.

⁵⁸ Sims Studio Diary, January 3rd 1915, p.75.

⁵⁹ Humphrey Milford, *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939. Bickerton then moved to Redbourn, in the diocese of St. Albans, in 1942.

⁶⁰ See *The Times*, op. cit., April 29th 1916, p.6.

⁶¹ See William Orpen, ed. *The Outline of Art*, London: George Newnes Ltd. 1924, pp.610-12.

⁶² As cited in *ibid.*, p.613.

⁶³ The first government appointed artist was the Scotsman Muirhead Bone in August 1916. He was a black and white artist who worked primarily in the form of etching, his draughtsmanship and particularly linear work lent itself to rapid on-the-spot sketches to be engraved later. William Orpen was sent to the front in April 1917 and a succession of artists followed him including John Lavery, Paul Nash and Christopher Nevinston. In the summer of 1917 the Canadian War Memorials Fund was instigated to collect war paintings by British artists. The scheme was administered by Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere who had long been a patron of Sims'.

⁶⁴ The elderly couple to the right hand side of the composition is a representation of Stephen Sims, Charles' father and Amy his stepmother.

⁶⁵ This sea might be read metaphorically as the space crossed from earth to heaven, and as the physical ocean between the battlefields of France and the Canadian families left at home. The scale of the two sets of figures enhances the feeling of dislocation, problematic though the composition is with the distant soldiers at a larger scale than the foreground civilians.

⁶⁶ *New Testament*, Gospel of John, 15:13.

⁶⁷ *Observer*, 1917. Date and page number unknown, (SSS).

⁶⁸ *Sunday Times*, 1917. Date and page number unknown, (SSS).

⁶⁹ This atrocity was said to have taken place in a village called St Julien or St Jean, near Ypres in Northern France on or around April 24th 1915. As with many other stories of horrific deeds by the enemy the rumour was discredited as propaganda and regarded as mythical in the years following the war. Supposed eyewitness reports disagree in detail, another reason to discredit the rumours. However, whether true or not, the story was visually arresting and added grist to the mill of the xenophobic.

⁷⁰ *Western ... News* (undecipherable) 1917, (SSS).

⁷¹ Wood's sculpture depicts an actual soldier in boots, helmet and greatcoat crucified against a support. This work was far more obviously linked to the rumour than Sims's Christ figure but the choice of metaphor seems more than co-incidental. Welsh painter David Jones also produced a crucifixion scene in or around 1919. His *Crucifixion* also laid emphasis on contemporaneity, depicting soldiers around the base of the cross in shorts and tin helmets, one with a 'pudding-basin' haircut. See Jonathan Miles and Derek Shiel, *David Jones: The Maker Unmade*, Bridgend: Seren, 1998. Christian imagery was a popular metaphor for the perceived sacrifice of life. Wood's sculpture (and to an extent Sims' commission) is more directly related to the contemporary crucifixion rumour – in Wood's case the title displays his awareness of the legend/incident. *The Crucified Soldier* 'Secret History,' Channel Four, Thursday, 12th December 2002. Dir. Jonathan Dent. Tiger Aspects Productions Ltd.

⁷² The Imperial War Museum's War Artists Archive holds correspondence between Sims and Yockney (mostly dealing with trivial complaints such as the weather) and from the various suppliers of sketching panels and other artist's materials.

⁷³ Meirion and Susie Harries, *The War Artists: British Official War Art of the 20th Century*, London: Joseph, in association with the Imperial War Museum and the Tate Gallery, 1983, p.102.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Meirion and Susie Harries footnote Lee's quotation with the comment that 'Sims' "strangeness" later developed into diagnosable mental illness, and in 1928 he drowned himself while the balance of his mind was disturbed.' *Ibid.*, p.291.

⁷⁶ For example, one of the surviving letters from Sims to Yockney complains: 'I have returned from France with the necessary material it was howling cold for working out of doors.' Imperial War Museum, First World War Artists Archive, File Number 286/7.

⁷⁷ 72" x 125." The painting cited as an example in particular was the National Gallery's third of Uccello's *Rout of San Romano*, c1456 (the other two panels hang in the Uffizi and the Louvre). See Meirion and Susie Harries, op. cit., p.91.

⁷⁸ Sims, op. cit., p.9.

⁷⁹ Agnes Sims' diary May 28th and June 13th 1918.

⁸⁰ 'Unit One,' *Listener*, 5th July, 1933, cited in Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p.82. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, London: The Bodley Head, 1990, p.ix. Agnes records Paul Nash coming to tea on March 21st 1919.

⁸¹ Paul Nash, 'Unit One,' cited in Andrew Causey, op. cit. p.82.

⁸² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, op. cit., p.235.

⁸³ Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p.66. For a different view of Nash's interaction with nature as a 'displacement of the modern,' after the war see David Peters Corbett, 'The absent city: Paul Nash,' Chapter 3 of *The Modernity of English Art*, op. cit., pp.100-26.

⁸⁴ Stanley Spencer described the opportunity granted by his later Burghclere Memorial Chapel commission (comparable to Sims' wish to exhibit his *Sacraments* in a chapel) as a psychological redemption: 'By this means I recover my lost self.' Stanley Spencer, as cited in Timothy Hyman, 'A Note on Burghclere: The Sandham Memorial Chapel 1927-32,' in Hyman and Patrick Wright, eds. *Stanley Spencer*, op. cit. p.240. The chapel building was designed and built for the express purpose of housing the cycle of works based upon Spencer's wartime experiences linked together by Christian liturgy. Spencer's equivalent to Nash's landscape as filter was his insistent concentration on the minutiae of domestic behaviour. His paintings at Burghclere depict soldiers engaged in mundanities such as making tea, filling their water bottles and sorting washing. Amidst this humanity and bathos the atrocities of warfare are distant. The predellas illustrating these scenes are the panels closest to the ground. Sue Malvern points out that this section of an altarpiece is 'traditionally... intended to be read at close quarters by the kneeling worshipper' and that Spencer's chosen designs for these panels were 'more closely autobiographical than the other images and often involve activities that take place on the floor.' Sue Malvern, 'Stanley Spencer at Burghclere,' *Art History*, Vol.23, no.2, June 2000, p.190. The events depicted in the chapel, and therefore the war itself, have been redeemed. Malvern suggests that the 'Burghclere paintings celebrate soldiery as an ecumenical, Christian fraternity,' as, ideally, in an English boys' school with its fundamental sense of continuity and tradition, p.199. This air of bread and butter Anglicanism is oddly comforting, it is matter of fact, objective, non-demanding and very English.

⁸⁵ This incident was confirmed by famous and well-respected individuals - Edward Gardner, president of the Theosophical society, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author and son of the Victorian painter of fairies, Richard Doyle. The story was only debunked relatively recently when one of the children involved - by this time an elderly lady - finally admitted that the 'fairies' had been nothing more than drawings fixed to the ground and foliage with hatpins. However ridiculous the stories may now appear with the benefit of hindsight, the point remains that many people believed them.

⁸⁶ See also *Lodsworth from River*, unknown date, a peaceful Sussex landscape described by Alan Sims as 'a glimpse of the Terrestrial Paradise after the War,' Sims op. cit., facing p.113.

⁸⁷ From his relocation to Burlington House as Keeper of the Academy in 1920 Agnes and Charles' social engagements together are less and less frequent. 1920 also saw the arrival of 'Mrs. Jeudwine' in Agnes' meticulous diary; Charles began to spend so much time with her that the conclusion that he was having an affair with her is inescapable.

Chapter Five: Sims in the 1920s

‘the bright young men and their brilliant way of saying nothing’

Two portraits, *The Countess of Rocksavage and her son*, 1922, and *King George V*, 1924, are prime examples of Sims’ adaptations of recognised conventions and key to an understanding of his position in the social context of the 1920s. Although both important commissions, *Lady Rocksavage* and *George V* illustrate two contrasting effects of his innate eclecticism and innovation. One a great success, the other a spectacular failure, these two portraits represent perhaps the zenith and nadir of Sims’ career, his increasingly difficult relationship with the Royal Academy and his acceptance by and subsequent banishment from society circles. The 1920s in particular saw certain artists and musicians assuming the role of court entertainers, pandering to the whims of the idle rich. For Sims, who was attempting various forms of public engagement and working on a series of high profile projects, this role was ultimately unsuccessful and unfulfilling. His search for a language appropriate to the preoccupations of the time led him through a succession of disparate decorative styles that were interestingly underpinned by an awareness of the contemporary significance of design principles as fundamental to the aesthetics of the period. Writing in 1919 he asserted that ‘the wonderful pictures of the world are still to do – but they must be made of the material of today.’¹ The artist’s endeavours to clothe his work in that material reveal his eagerness to find a role within the traumatized post-war context, but his efforts, either too erudite or simply inappropriate, ultimately fell wide of the mark and were largely misunderstood both by his own generation and the emergent cultural plutocracy of ‘bright young things.’

Sims' new position at the Royal Academy Schools brought with it responsibilities towards its teaching syllabus and influence on the works chosen for hanging in its exhibitions.² For Alan Sims his father's most significant reform was his policy of employing visiting lecturers 'chose[n] for their actual consequence as artists, without regard for their official standing... Mr. Augustus John darkened the threshold of the Schools, to the horror of all right-thinking Members.'³ In a characteristically light-hearted letter in the archive, dated October 26th 1921 [fig.108], Orpen mentions an invitation from Sims to go and teach but 'surely it will take them a year to get over a month of Augustus.'⁴

8 S to Gaudin's SV
26-10-21

* dearest... has now disengaged me.

My dear Sims - I regret my neglect in not answering your letter before, I was engaged with dearest Helenie.* Do you really want me to teach again at the schools? I can hardly believe it - it seems too bad to be true - Surely it will take them a year to get over a month of Augustus - have pretty in the pit, dears - (it takes me a year to get over one month of them)

it is a very simple nothing could run and run Sims come here Sunday evening and eat some bread and water - (the meal will be about up to the Rothstein standard, this in "otto" voice (not "blotto")). it so telephone me on receipt - and I will order another coat - and the water shall be cooked or warmed according to what the papers say the weather will be like - day dress or night clothes - but no dinner jackets or tails - or any thing of that sort of thing - they stole the bread

Fig. 108 Letter from William Orpen to CS, 26.10.1921, recto, archive

In a letter to Gordon Bottomley, Paul Nash suggested that Sims' appointment meant that there was 'hope for England yet' and that in his experience Sims was 'the only Academician... who hasn't got a white beard and certainly the only one who has interest and sympathy with modern work outside Burlington House.'⁵ Sims' attitude to the Academy and its teachings had previously been at best ambivalent, 'institutions like the Academy foster mediocrity,' and his aim was clearly one of improvement and reorganization.⁶ The Academy Exhibition of 1921 was the first that Sims was involved in hanging, this was his opportunity to effect a change upon the mediocrity he perceived: 'In a society of seventy members the great majority are forcedly second rate artists. It is not so clear why they should honestly prefer second rate work.'⁷ In May 1921, Frank Salisbury, who had exhibited at the Academy for many years, wrote a heated letter to the *Times* complaining at the injustice of selection for this show - not only had several established artists been rejected in favour of student work, but fewer paintings than usual had been hung, 'the committee prefer one-third of their red-distempered walls to some of the fine pictures... of the rejected.'⁸ Salisbury speaks in tones reminiscent of war reportage, of, 'counting the cost, of sacrifice... depression and distress,' and his criticism - of Sims although he doesn't name him - is of the 'mistaken enthusiasm and prejudiced judgement [of] men in a new position of power.'⁹

Frank Rutter's *Sunday Times* review of the show was headed 'Great Changes Visible this Year.' Rutter, long a critic of the Academy and supporter of British modernism,¹⁰ found himself in the awkward position of trying to criticize the work of artists he had previously supported, simply because their paintings were now in the Academy - he could not 'honestly say that all these artists are painting less well than they have done; and yet it goes very much against the grain to admit that this Academy is better than the

Academies of ten or twenty years ago.’¹¹ Rutter attributed the change to the gradual infiltration of the Academy by previous NEAC exhibitors, but insisted that it still remained twenty years behind the times: ‘it is the New English Art Club of 1901 that the Academy of 1921 most closely resembles.’¹² The controversy generated by the show - on one hand the bile of the traditionalists and on the other the begrudging acceptance of the more progressive critics - is evidence that Sims and his hanging committee had made their mark.¹³ The reforms put in place had started to attract wider attention and the Academy in this period emerges as a rather more complex and potentially interesting institution than before.¹⁴

As Keeper of the Academy Sims was entitled to accommodation in Burlington House. He took rooms there with his family, but from this point his movements were very different from those of Agnes whose detailed social diary, invaluable to this study, refers to Sims less and less throughout the 20s when we would expect his social life to be particularly active, concentrating rather on her independent engagements.¹⁵ This move coincided with the first mention in her diary of his, probable, mistress, Mrs. Jeudwine. Sims’ relationship with Vivienne Jeudwine represented a significant change in his circumstances and was a major contributory factor in his eventual decline. His alienation from his wife and children over-shadowed his burgeoning success, and his growing renown as a fashionable society portrait painter. Harold Speed commented on the change in his friend’s character since his acceptance of the Keepership, ‘his gay open nature changed, he became more reserved and aloof, with even a suspicion of arrogance.’¹⁶ Sims’ new found influence and idiosyncratic leanings meant that, for a time, the Academy was run according to his personal aesthetic and pedagogical principles. John Sims recalls being told by Alan that one of his first acts was to organize

the students into a ritual smashing of the life-room plaster casts, representative of an antiquated teaching mode hated by Sims himself whilst studying there. A more extreme and probably apocryphal recollection of his methods is that of student Rex Whistler who told his brother that Sims had ‘abolished his teaching staff’ in order to form ‘a one-man institution.’¹⁷ Sims made the most of his influence during his time as Keeper – his attitude was undoubtedly coloured by the irony of his new status in relation to his own expulsion from the Schools.

Reproductions in the *Royal Academy Illustrated* for 1921 reveal the proportion of contemporary artists’ works of a spiritual, symbolic or whimsical bent – all elements of Sims’ own pre-war work – from Fred Appleyard’s *Presences Plain in the Place* [fig.109], in which a quasi-religious ceremony is conducted by draped figures in sacred ruins, to *fêtes galantes* by Harold Speed and Ernest Board. Speed’s *The Garden of Pan* and Board’s *Dress and the Wood Nymphs* [fig.110] are both playful explorations of the enchanted garden theme – a consistent preoccupation of Sims.’ The work that points most closely to his hand in the selection process is undoubtedly that of his student, Agnes Tatham’s, *The Idol*, [fig.111] a painting highly reminiscent of Sims’ pre-war *La Cage aux Amours* or *The Trophy*. It depicts a nude youth in a sunny garden stretching to kiss the feet of a statue surrounded by prostrate adulatory figures.¹⁸ Contemporaries of Sims such as Harry Morley, George Spencer Watson and Philip Connard consistently exhibited open-air scenes of allegorical figures throughout the 20s. In 1921 his contemporary at Julian’s during the 1890s Frederick Cayley Robinson, and notoriously, Augustus John, were elected ARAs.¹⁹ During the ‘Sims Years’ the Academy exhibitions saw a preponderance of whimsical variations on classical themes – see for example the work of George Spencer Watson – whilst Philip Connard’s continual explorations of

variations on the *fête galante* were a regular sight. Connard's *Pastoral Players*, and *Summer*, both RA 1922, and *Pastoral*, or *Kensington Gardens* of 1923 are all composed on the figures-in-idyllic-landscape theme. But on closer examination, *Pastoral Players*, [fig.112] though peopled by a Harlequin and Columbine also involves recognisably modern elements such as the bare-legged and shingle-haired spectator on the right. Connard juxtaposes contemporary reality and fantasy, just as Sims had in *The Little Faun* and *Julia*. His *Summer* and *Pastoral* [fig.113] both also appear to be Watteau-esque scenes with roving goats, dappled sunlight and peaceful lakes. Again, hints and self-conscious pointers to contemporary reality appear – the foreground nude in *Pastoral* appears to be reclining on a candlewick bedspread, whilst her companions' exotic garb owes more to Alfred Munnings' *Mrs Mark Stevens* than Watteau.²⁰ There is a sense that these very particular *fêtes galantes* are contemporary scenes and, moreover, though based on a historical theme, the participants are fashionable figures who inhabit the hedonistic milieu of the 'bright young things' of the 1920s.²¹



Fig.109 Fred Appleyard, *Presences Plain in the Place*, RA 1921, oil or tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.110 Ernest Board, *Dress and the Wood Nymphs*, RA 1921, oil or tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.111 Agnes C. Tatham, *The Idol*, RA 1921, oil or tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.112 Philip Connard, *Pastoral Players*, RA 1922, oil or tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.113 Philip Connard, *Pastoral*, RA 1923, oil or tempera on canvas, South African National Gallery, Cape Town

Sims' own contributions to the 1921 exhibition included two landscapes, *Romney Marsh*, bought by Lord Rothermere, and *On the Road to Gorbio from Mentone*, (untraced); and *Wedgwood*, of which a photograph exists in the archive.²² For Frank Rutter, *Wedgwood* [fig.114], a scene of two nudes at the sea's edge holding a child between them, was 'delightfully decorative in its colour and pattern, [and] accomplished to the fingertips in its execution.'²³ By the early 1920s particular emphasis on design and the decorative had taken centre stage, David Peters Corbett has stated, as the means 'through which the gleanings of a modernist vocabulary could be allowed into established practice to reinvigorate' British post-war painting.²⁴ When Rutter described *Wedgwood* in 1921 as 'decorative' he did not use the term to 'mean... added and usually unnecessary ornament,' but rather to refer to the 'whole mode of conception and manner of treatment.'²⁵ For Rutter, the increasing interest in the applied arts and upsurge in printmaking, particularly woodcuts and wood engravings, pointed towards the increased awareness of the importance of design and an architectural framework. Writing in his studio diary in 1920, Sims berated himself over the composition of another untraced painting, *The Shower Bath*.²⁶ A photograph of this painting also exists in the archive [fig.115]. Sims has painted a succession of semi-clad figures processing towards a neo-classical structure (the shower of the title) set in a seemingly Mediterranean coastal landscape with mountains in the background. The majority of the group are posing in a row along a raised dais area, very much in the tradition of a frieze or bas-relief, the figures are lightly, if at all, modelled; as in *Wedgwood* their pale bodies are negative silhouettes against the background. On the right-hand side of the group, cropped by the edge of the composition, Sims has reintroduced the bending female figure in the foreground of his *Island Festival*, another figure poses like a classical discus thrower, and the central figure with her back to the viewer appeared in

The Wood Beyond the World via Botticelli's *Prima Vera*. To his self-critical eye these collaged figures were 'posturing without design,' he 'should have made them into a rhythmic pattern, and all full of intention.'²⁷ This shows clearly his awareness of aesthetic principles of the kind Rutter espoused and illustrates perhaps, his continued effort to control that earlier instinct towards chaos in his compositions.²⁸



Fig.114 CS, *Wedgwood*, RA 1921, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

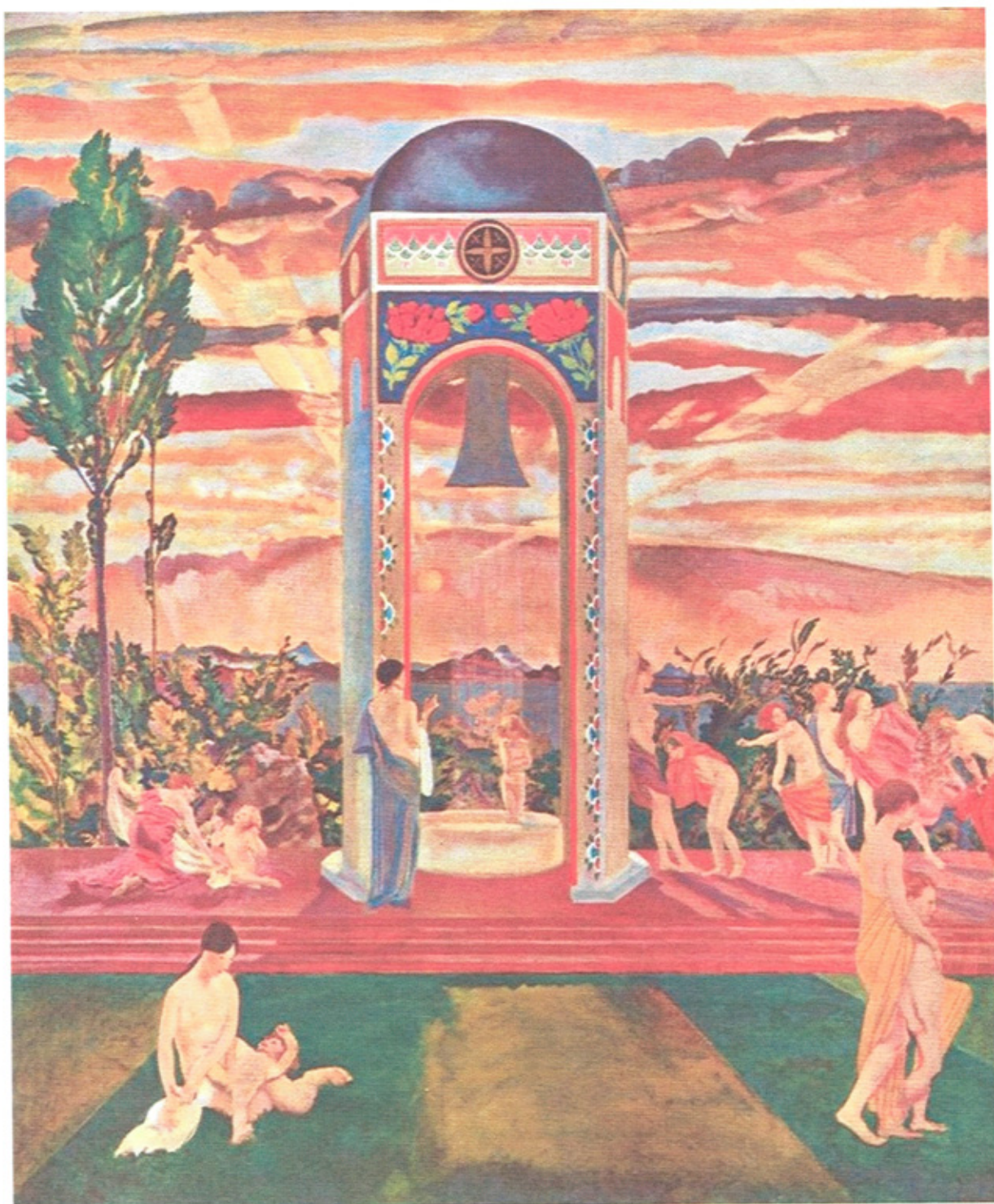


Fig.115 CS, *The Shower Bath*, c1920, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown, photograph from archive GB3025/1/1/5

Wedgwood represents a continuation of the classical composition investigated throughout works such as the *Iris* series, 1915, and *Epilogue*, 1922 [fig.116].²⁹ Both of these were conceived as paintings but were reworked as etchings and aquatints during

the twenties when he had access to the Burlington House facilities and are typical of Sims' recent habit of developing an image through a series of distinct processes. Printmaking, particularly aquatinting, allows for little spontaneity in design. The meticulous and exhaustive process relies on considerable forward planning and patience. Sims had experimented with the far simpler discipline of drypoint etching in his student days, now, with access to the equipment and with his current interests he experimented with aquatinting. This procedure allows subtle gradations of tone, each grade acid-bitten individually, the plate adjusted multiple times. The proof of *Iris* (which he also titled *The Offering*) contained in the archive [fig.117] reveals at least five gradations of tone in addition to hatched drypoint marks. With *Epilogue*, Sims complicated the process further by investigating the possibilities of printing with coloured inks, also graded in tone. This required a plate for each colour as well as the original monochrome.³⁰

In *Wedgwood* Sims developed the 'nymph and cherub in a landscape' theme of, for example, *Syrid and Pattatos*, and referred directly to the decorative arts.³¹ His premise was that the best way to treat figures was to 'make them more of a design (pattern) than the landscape' framing them.³² This suggests something of the language used by Roger Fry and Clive Bell in discussions of Cézanne.³³ Bell's insistence on the fundamentals of 'significant form,' meaningful here, is underpinned by an awareness of order and architectural structure.³⁴ But Sims' writings generally show more in common with current debate than his imagery does, *Wedgwood* clearly does not relate visually to Cézanne's *Baigneuse*, however its conception does echo contemporary accounts of aesthetic principles.³⁵ Sims had absorbed current debates about the qualities of design inherent in composition and adopted aspects here – he relates his painting directly to the

applied or decorative arts. His carefully planned composition echoes the bas-relief figures of the Wedgwood factory's famous Jasper Ware, the pale figures thrown into relief against the blue sky and sea; he acknowledged this reference freely in the title. In an oil sketch for this painting in the collection of Bury Museum and Art Gallery [fig.118] it is clear that the sky and sea have been painted in around the figures. Sims has decided on the balanced positioning of the figures before thinking about the seascape behind.³⁶ He applied aspects of these principles, again working into a classical framework, in his *Countess of Rocksavage and her Son* – a major portrait commission.



Fig.116 CS, *Epilogue*, coloured aquatint, c1921, archive GB3025/1/2/44



Fig.117 CS, *The Offering*, drypoint and aquatint – artist's proof, c1921, archive GB3025/1/2/32



Fig.118 CS, sketch for *Wedgwood*, oil or tempera on canvas, c1921, Bury Museum and Art Gallery

The Countess of Rocksavage, née Sybil Sassoon, and later the Marchioness of Cholmondeley, was the sister of the well-known patron, Philip Sassoon. The family had amassed an impressive collection – Philip was particularly interested in eighteenth century paintings and furniture and was a rather eccentric philanthropist – and both brother and sister had been painted previously by famous artists of the day. John Singer Sargent for example, was a family friend, having painted and drawn Sybil and her mother several times, and William Orpen, Rex Whistler and Glyn Philpot were all part of their circle.³⁷ After her marriage in 1913, Sybil's main residence was at the Cholmondeley family home, Houghton Hall in Norfolk, which she nurtured – landscaping and redecorating – until her death in 1989. If Sims had had prestigious portrait commissions before, from 'important' families such as the Hayes Sadlers (1909 and 12) and the Flemings (1915 and 16), it was with Sybil Rocksavage that he really cemented his reputation as a society portraitist and secured his entrance into the higher echelons of the fashionable aristocratic set.³⁸ Descendants of the Rothschild empire, Philip and Sybil regularly entertained royalty, prominent politicians and other society figures – his presence amongst this sort of company is evidence of Sims' new found status.³⁹ A later painting, of 1923, *The Marchioness of Cholmondeley in the Ballroom at 25 Park Lane*, [figs.119-20] indicates that Sims had visited the house.⁴⁰ Biographer Peter Stansky mentions that Sybil had been visiting Sims' studio since the war years, and a letter from Orpen to 'My dear Simsie (as Sybil would call you!)' dated June 1925, suggests that their friendship was long-term and affectionate.⁴¹

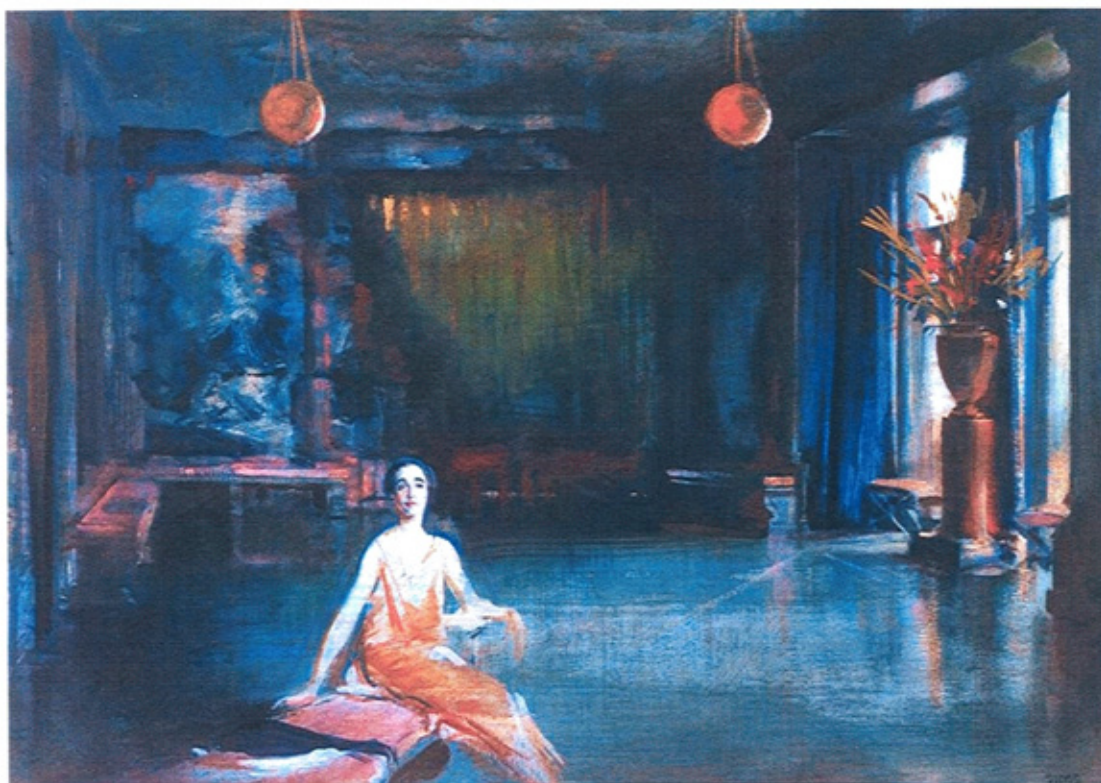


Fig.119 CS, *The Marchioness of Cholmondeley in the Ballroom at 25 Park Lane*, c1923, oil or tempera on canvas, Cholmondeley Family Collection



Fig.120 CS, *Sketch for The Marchioness of Cholmondeley...* c1923, graphite on paper, archive GB3025/4/14

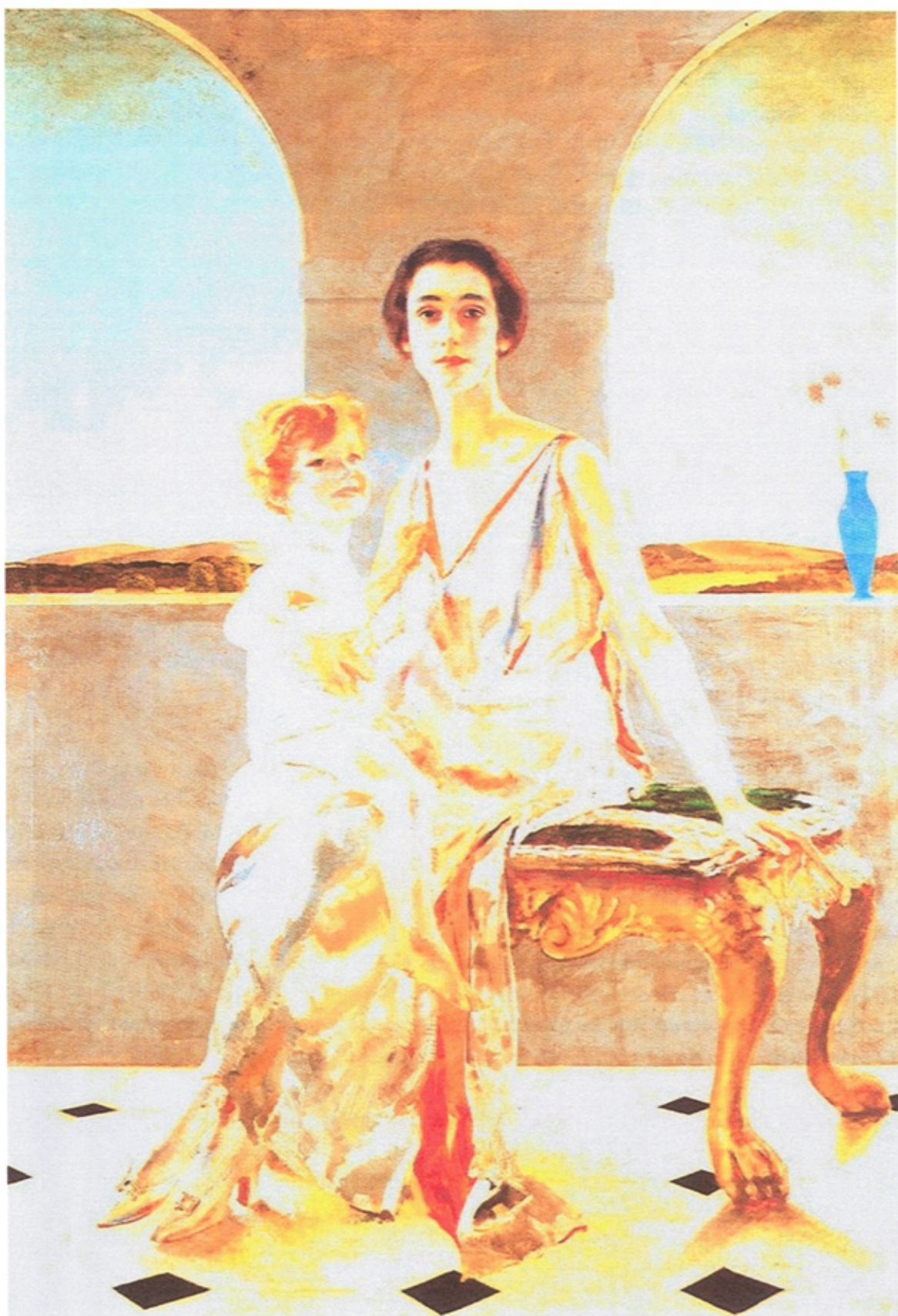


Fig.121 CS, *The Countess of Rocksavage and her Son*, RA 1922, tempera and oil on canvas, Cholmondeley Family Collection

In 1922 Sims' portrait of Sybil and her eldest son Hugh, later Lord Malpas, was the Academy Picture of the Year [fig.121]. Images of maternity had long been a stock theme of the artist and with the *Countess of Rocksavage* he extended the stylistic possibilities of the theme still further, utilizing the principles of balance and design that now preoccupied him and producing an image not only celebrating his sitters' standing but also his own.⁴² A glimpse of the Italianate landscape of his *Seven Sacraments* and the symmetrical framework of the arching windows gave his 20th century subject the air of a Fra Angelico Madonna and Child. The coupling of this timeless quality with quasi-Impressionistic visible brushwork and a high-pitched colour scheme led one critic to remark that Sims had, 'carrie[d] off the "society" portrait into a new, sweet, empyreal air.'⁴³ The amalgamation of the ancient and the modern, enveloped by his trademark 'moist, silvery light' that appeared sometimes to dissolve form, sometimes to highlight it, prompted description as a 'revelation... a combination of opposite qualities in the firm grip of a master hand.'⁴⁴ Sims, as in the rest of his oeuvre, had always been experimental with portraiture, creating compositions that echoed his current preoccupations and utilized the sitter as a core element but not the sole subject. In his portrait of *Mrs. Hayes Sadler*, 1909, [fig.122] the figure only inhabited a fraction of the canvas – the rest of the composition comprising of her garden, the ornamental balustrades and Chinese lanterns of a fashionable Edwardian soiree. This of course coincided with Sims' then interest in the 18th century *fête galante*. His *Mrs. Harold Phillips* of 1907 [fig.123] had also exhibited an interest in the 'wriggle and chiffon' of Sargent, as well as the low horizon and silhouetted figure of Monet's *Essai de figure en plein air*, 1886. By 1916, his portrait of Mrs. Val Fleming entitled *The Embroideress*, [fig.124] signalled a preoccupation with Florentine technique, similar to Gerald Brockhurst's *Ranunculus*, (date unknown), a manner described by Sims as inspired by

‘Pollaiuolo: Beautiful forms with a knife-like outline... all the modelling in the edge, and very little within the form.’⁴⁵ Now, with his *Countess of Rocksavage*, Sims adopted aesthetic principles of the day and brought together a *quattrocento* Madonna and Child with something of the airiness and translucency of cinematography into a thoroughly modern portrait, unlike anything that he had produced before (and overtaking even the most sought-after portraitists of the time – Orpen and McEvoy).



Fig.122 CS, *Mrs. Hayes Sadler*, 1909, oil and tempera on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.123 CS, *Mrs. Harold Phillips*, 1907, oil on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.124 CS, *The Embroideress (Mrs. Val Fleming)*, 1916, tempera on canvas, Private Collection, photograph archive GB3025/1/3/77

Orpen's portraits were particularly in demand in the post-war years, following the success of his official war work, but according to Bruce Arnold it was with his 1913 portrait of Sybil Rocksavage that, as with Sims, the world of society portraiture was opened to him.⁴⁶ He subsequently wrote to his friend and patron Hugh Lane that he was 'painting profs. and judges' until he felt 'nearly off [his] chump.'⁴⁷ By the 1920s Orpen was earning, on average, £30,000 per year from commissions, and his submissions to the Royal Academy during this period were a steady procession of portraits of the rich and famous. His *Countess of Rocksavage* [fig.125] was a study in a range of chromatic greys lifted by splashes of warm oranges and reds. Her flesh glows against the darker tones of the backdrop and, in a technique characteristic of Orpen, she is lit from two directions; from the left by cool daylight and from the right by warmer reflected light. The *chinoiserie* shawl she wears, dappled with intricate embroidery, extends the patterning on the curtains behind whilst subtly shifting from cool hues to warm as if to reinforce the breathing form beneath it. Orpen hints at his sitter's exotic origins whilst simultaneously producing a very aristocratic portrait – it is not a dynamic painting, but poised, elegant and tasteful. Sargent's portrait of the same year [fig.126], when Sybil was barely twenty years old, is a similarly restrained exploration of shifting hues – in his case warmer golds and browns – that hints at her noble bearing and does so in a very dignified fashion. Both artists emphasised her aquiline features, dark eyebrows and swan-like neck, pointing to her Jewish heritage, but as 1913 was the year of Sybil's marriage to the Earl of Rocksavage we can assume that both portraits were designed to commemorate this auspicious occasion – her legitimate entry into the English nobility.



Fig.125 William Orpen, *Countess of Rocksavage*, 1913, oil or tempera on canvas, Chormondeley Family Collection



Fig.126 John Singer Sargent, *Sybil Sassoon*, 1913, oil on canvas, Chormondeley Family Collection

Orpen was well aware of his role as the society portraitist of the period, and equally conscious of his rivals to the title – in 1920 he was reputedly offered a vast sum of money by an American dealer to work for him for six months to which he replied ‘Too weak, try McEvoy.’⁴⁸ Ambrose McEvoy had built up a reputation for feathery, ethereal portraits of society ladies that adopted certain aspects of modernist technique and broke from staid traditionalism. By 1925 his standing was such that one commentator remarked that ‘if I were a young and charming woman... no one should paint me but Mr. Ambrose McEvoy.’⁴⁹ His sitters were revealed as *à la mode* as well as beautiful and gentrified. Increasingly, from the 1890s onwards a portrait had to be more than a likeness, it had to reflect the personality, aspirations and social standing of the sitter.⁵⁰ McEvoy’s women were feminine and fashion conscious, Orpen’s ‘profs and judges’ dignified and commanding respect. Sims presented Sybil Rocksavage as *The Times* suggested, ‘playing with her son before the gong goes for dinner,’ thus, perhaps, reinforcing the aristocratic, leisured status assumed by the Sassoons.⁵¹ Though her family was Jewish and undeniably *nouveau riche* Sims’ depiction was of a modern English noblewoman - her blond blue-eyed son on her knee. Peter Stansky quotes an approximation of the old saying, ‘there are no Blacks on Bond Street,’ as ‘there are no Jews in the English aristocracy,’ meaning that once status and wealth has been achieved race and creed are irrelevant; the portrait reinforced this sentiment.⁵²

There is no evidence to pinpoint the setting of the portrait, although there are suggestions that it was conceived in or around Monte Carlo.⁵³ By the 1920s it was possible to visit France again, the Midi was a favourite destination for artists and the Côte d’Azur was a fashionable playground for the English and American upper-classes. Sims spent time there himself, certainly in 1924, 1925 and 1928, and probably earlier as

his landscape of 1921, *On the Road to Gorbio from Mentone*, illustrates a scene in the locality.⁵⁴ For Douglas Goldring, writing a travel guide to the area in the late twenties, the Riviera represented a ‘microcosm of English middle and upper-class society.’⁵⁵ The place-names – St.Tropez, Monte Carlo, Cannes - still evoke the glamorous social milieu of the twenties and thirties, the hedonistic flapper and playboy lifestyle of the idle rich. It is possibly to this setting that the *Countess of Rocksavage* relates. The unglazed arching windows offering a view of blue skies and idyllic countryside, the purity and clarity of light reflecting from the marble-tiled *terrazzo*, the semi-nudity of the child and his mother’s bare arms – all of these elements point firmly away from damp Northern climes towards the Mediterranean South and its fashionable lifestyle.⁵⁶ However it is also possible that the portrait was completed at Port Lympne, Philip Sassoon’s Kent mansion, commissioned just before the war and eccentrically designed to reflect his rather *outré* personality. The arched windows framing the figures are similar to those in his dining room [fig.127], and Sims’ handling of the plasterwork echoes the architect’s description of the wall-covering, ‘rusticated’ with a ‘warm, moss-borne effect, streaked with gold.’⁵⁷ Port Lympne overlooked Romney Marsh, which Sims had previously painted, (RA 1921), and it is possible that this was the view through the windows in his portrait. Another similarity is in the style of the claw-footed stool that Sybil Rocksavage sits on, and the dining furniture visible in the photograph reproduced in Stansky [fig.128].⁵⁸



Fig.127 The dining room at Port L ympne, Philip Sassoon's Kent mansion



Fig.128 Chair detail (note claw foot and lion's face)



Detail of *The Countess of Rocksavage*

Wherever the setting, its elegance confirms Sybil's class status, but most importantly, Sims also hinted at her status as a modern woman. The gown she wears is in the style of a Madeleine Vionnet design - softly draping fabric cut to above the ankle on the bias and emphasising her boyish figure – the height of fashion during this period.⁵⁹ Her hair is ambiguously styled – it is probably swept up and secured at the back of her head, however Sims emphasises the silhouette as that of a 'bob' cut beloved by the young 'Flappers' recently liberated from their stays and hairpins. This shape is further echoed in the abruptly terminated archways behind the figures. Lady Rocksavage is neither overtly nor flamboyantly modish, but the artist provides enough references to her fashionability.

If Sims' *Countess of Rocksavage* was designed to reinforce Sybil's standing by simultaneously implying tradition via *quattrocento* elements and modernity via hints at her fashionable milieu, John Singer Sargent's portrait of the same year [fig.129] was also clearly intended to give the family the assumed weight of history and breeding. It portrayed Lady Rocksavage in a dark dress of an Elizabethan style against a dark background. Philip Sassoon was apparently delighted with this Velázquez-like rendition of his sister, describing it as 'a masterpiece – her face is like a camellia with an electric light behind it.'⁶⁰ The *Daily Sketch* was equally adulatory, singing the praises of the sitter and remarking (in a very English sense) that amongst her many attributes, Sybil was also a 'really fine shot.'⁶¹



Fig.129 John Singer Sargent, *The Countess of Rocksavage*, RA 1922, oil on canvas, Cholmondeley collection

Both renditions were exhibited in the Academy of 1922, and the reputation of Sims' *Countess of Rocksavage* was only aided by its proximity to Sargent's far more traditional painting. The gloomy, heavily encrusted decoration of the velvet gown and ceremonial jewellery are all redolent of the stuffy historical portraiture now, it would seem, in stark relation to the Sims, and totally inappropriate to the era. Critics reported on the battle between the two pictures, and the *Daily Chronicle* printed them side by side labelling them 'two of the most discussed pictures of the year.'⁶² This kind of reportage inevitably heightened the alleged rivalry between the works and encouraged the public to take sides. The *Daily Chronicle* backed Sargent, naming his as the Picture of the Year and shying away from Sims' more adventurous handling. However, most other critics described Sims first and then Sargent as a comparison. It was as if Sims' *Countess* effectively drew a line under the era of the Edwardian portrait as represented by Sargent, its leading exponent. His painting was avowedly more modern, it pointed to the future and the painting toured the country to much acclaim. The seeds of his reputation as a fashionable portrait artist had been sown and his contributions to the following year's Academy show were all portraits.⁶³

In 1924 the artist exhibited a portrait of his mistress, *Mrs. Jeudwine and her son, Wynne* [fig.130]. This is of identical dimensions to the *Countess of Rocksavage* and the poses of the figures and their placement within the composition are remarkably alike. Both women sit centrally amidst an organised framework of, in *Rocksavage*, stonework, and in *Mrs. Jeudwine* of foliage and roses on a trellis. Both are clad in modern dress and the two boys are semi-nude. The figures of both women form a diagonal across the composition, their legs taper down towards elegantly crossed ankles in the left-hand corner. But the significance of the comparison lies in the differences. The space

between Lady Rocksavage and her son illustrates the formality of the portrait – he grasps at her dress but she does not touch him. She gazes coolly out towards the viewer, a serene but rather haughty expression on her face. The geometrical arrangement of the background and balanced classical composition increases the sense of decorum. Mrs. Jeudwine clasps her son to her, creating a far more intimate and informal atmosphere. A *Punch* cartoon, [fig.131] contemporary to the exhibition of *Mrs. Jeudwine* recognised the painting's lack of ceremony, its air of playfulness. The cartoonist compares it to Solomon J. Solomon's formal portrait *Mrs. Burrowes of Stradone and her Son, Bobby*.⁶⁴

Vivienne Jeudwine's dress is decorated with a leaf motif and the surrounding foliage spills across the foreground of the picture entangling itself into the folds of her skirts.⁶⁵ Sims is associating her firmly with the nature around her, the implication is rather more romantic than classical. The only hint of nature in the *Countess of Rocksavage* is in the distant landscape, removed from the scene, and the pristine but lifeless flower arrangement on the windowsill. Unlike the *Countess of Rocksavage*, the painting of the Jeudwines would never be described as a Madonna and Child - it is too alive and unceremonious – but this is precisely what it was. Perhaps in expectation of his portrait of George V – shown at the same Academy - being greeted with critical acclaim and popularity, Sims took the opportunity to introduce his mistress and her son to the public. He adopted and adapted the model that had worked magnificently two years previously.⁶⁶ But unfortunately for Vivienne Jeudwine, and for Sims, the furore surrounding the King's portrait meant none of the contemporary reviews made a connection between the two paintings, at best it was 'graceful,' whereas it was described elsewhere as 'very inferior' and 'very incomplete.'⁶⁷ The painting is undoubtedly problematic. Its component parts are rather uneven. The paint is in some

areas thickly impasted whilst in others barely sketched in; the formality of Vivienne's dress does not relate comfortably to Wynne's nudity; the proscenium arch formed by the trellis emphasises a sense of theatricality. The stone bench, roses and cumulus suggest an English summer's day, but the composition alludes to the England of follies and manufactured grottoes in the grounds of stately homes – the juxtaposition of artifice and nature. The painting is, in essence, a personal *fête galante* disguised as a portrait, indicative perhaps of the tension between Sims' private inclination to create idyllic arcadias and his recent public ambition as a successful portraitist.



Fig.130 CS, *Mrs. Jeudwine and her son Wynne*, 1924, oil or tempera on canvas, Private Collection, photograph archive GB3025/1/3/93



Fig.131 *Punch* cartoon, 'Royal Academy Exhibition 1924,' Paintings parodied are CS Mrs Jeudwine and her son Wynne and Solomon J. Solomon Mrs. Burrowes of Stradone and her Son, Bobby.

In February 1923 Sims was commissioned to paint King George V. Traditionally, the Monarch's portrait was painted by the President of the Royal Academy. In this case the task fell to the Keeper as the current President, Sir Aston Webb, was an architect. Sims worked throughout the year on an ambitious life-size representation of the King in his garter robes [fig.132]. A watercolour study for the crown is in the archive [fig.134]. The portrait had been surrounded by public attention and anticipation - the *Graphic* published a photograph of Sims painting it before even the King had seen it and described the portrait prematurely as 'The Picture of the Year,' see [fig.133] - but when it was exhibited in 1924 it failed to receive the acclaim Sims must have hoped for. Initial reviews were on the whole positive. The critics agreed that Sims had 'produced the most human Royal portrait in living memory,' it was, said the *Telegraph*, 'one of the most interesting pictures' of the Academy and a 'brilliant success.'⁶⁸ Indeed, for Walter Sickert, the work was a 'miracle of painting,' which led him to propose that Sims should be appointed Professor of Painting at the Academy with 'subordinate assistants engaged to carry out his orders... [for] Paint has no excuse for existence if it is not, first

and foremost, in itself beautiful.’⁶⁹ However there were also mutterings that the King appeared ‘undistinguished and worn,’ that the ‘expression of the eyes is that of a short-sighted man who has mislaid his glasses,’ and that the legs were ‘almost transparent – certainly lacking in substance.’⁷⁰ Sims’ rejoinder was that his aim had been:

to make an accurate representation of the King – which, incidentally has not been done for many years... If the portrait comes as a shock to a large number, as I am told it does... it is because portraits of King George have been far too conventional in the past, and no-one has shown that he is now, with the passage of time, an elderly man.⁷¹

But criticism spread with the rumour that the King himself did not like the portrait.⁷² It would seem that Sims, who could ‘not paint a portrait without making it a delightful picture into the bargain’ had misjudged not only the particular impression required by George V himself but, perhaps more significantly, had not portrayed the assumed role of the King as expected by the public and produced in conventional renderings by contemporaries like Frank Salisbury.⁷³ The painting was not an appropriate representation: Sims failed on two major fronts. The head of the King was too naturalistic, the rendering of the face too clearly revealed his age and the rest of the composition was too consciously theatrical, seemingly relating to the overblown pomp and ceremony of the 17th century, not to 20th century modern life. The swags, tassels, voluminous robes and even the palette mirror Rigaud’s famous *Louis XIV* [fig.135] – but here Sims was depicting a very different kind of ruler. Far from emphasising the power of the monarch, the trappings of ceremony here seem to diminish him: the scale of the head suggests a disproportionately small body subsumed beneath the weight of the robes; his feet resting on the stool imply that the throne is too high for him; the background drapery does not disguise the height of the pillar to add stature to the sitter (as in the Rigaud) it seems poised to collapse across him, wiping out as it falls the incongruously transparent Royal crest hovering on the picture plane.



Fig.132 CS, *His Majesty King George V*, 1924, tempera on canvas, destroyed, photographic image from scrapbook in archive

It is possible that either one of these traits, the naturalism of the portrait or the theatricality of the setting, would have resulted in a successful painting. But together they appeared incongruous, for Frank Rutter the portrait fell ‘between the two stools of realism and decoration.’⁷⁴ The humanity of the painting admired by more enlightened critics was too much for an audience accustomed to portraits of occupations and social influence rather than of men. Society portraiture was prestigious and lucrative in the Edwardian era and continued to be so after the Great War. Debutantes and wealthy landowners clambered over each other to be immortalised in paint in the guise of their chosen character and, as Kenneth McConkey has suggested, the ‘discreet falsification of appearances was the essence of the portrait painter’s art.’⁷⁵ Both sitter and viewer *expected* the truth to be massaged and were indignant when the conventions were disobeyed. Clare Ousley, writing for the *New York Herald* in 1924 related some of the complaints she had overheard from members of the public:

One complained that the lips were too red. ‘Looks as though he used a lip-stick,’ snorted this irate gentleman. ‘My God,’ moaned another, ‘Look at those legs!’ A portly dowager in a feather boa puffed out indignantly, ‘Wicked! A perfect libel!’ Some one questioned, ‘What are they going to do with it?’ to which a wrathful Scotsman... retorted, ‘They ought to put it up in a shooting gallery.’⁷⁶

Whilst Ousley has obviously played up the comic value of the caricatured British for her readers, her observations reflected wider feeling. Her ‘wrathful Scotsman’ was close to the mark and the work was destined for the Royal Academy incinerator. This failure and the adverse publicity it generated had a profound effect on Sims. Brandon Taylor has suggested that it was a primary factor in his later suicide and the episode certainly marked a watershed in his career – the point when he toppled from the peak of public and critical favour and began to be disillusioned about his ultimately fragile status.⁷⁷

THE DAILY GRAPHIC MARCH 31, 1924

TO-DAY'S BIG NEWSPAPER ISSUE. **20** Pages

DAILY GRAPHIC

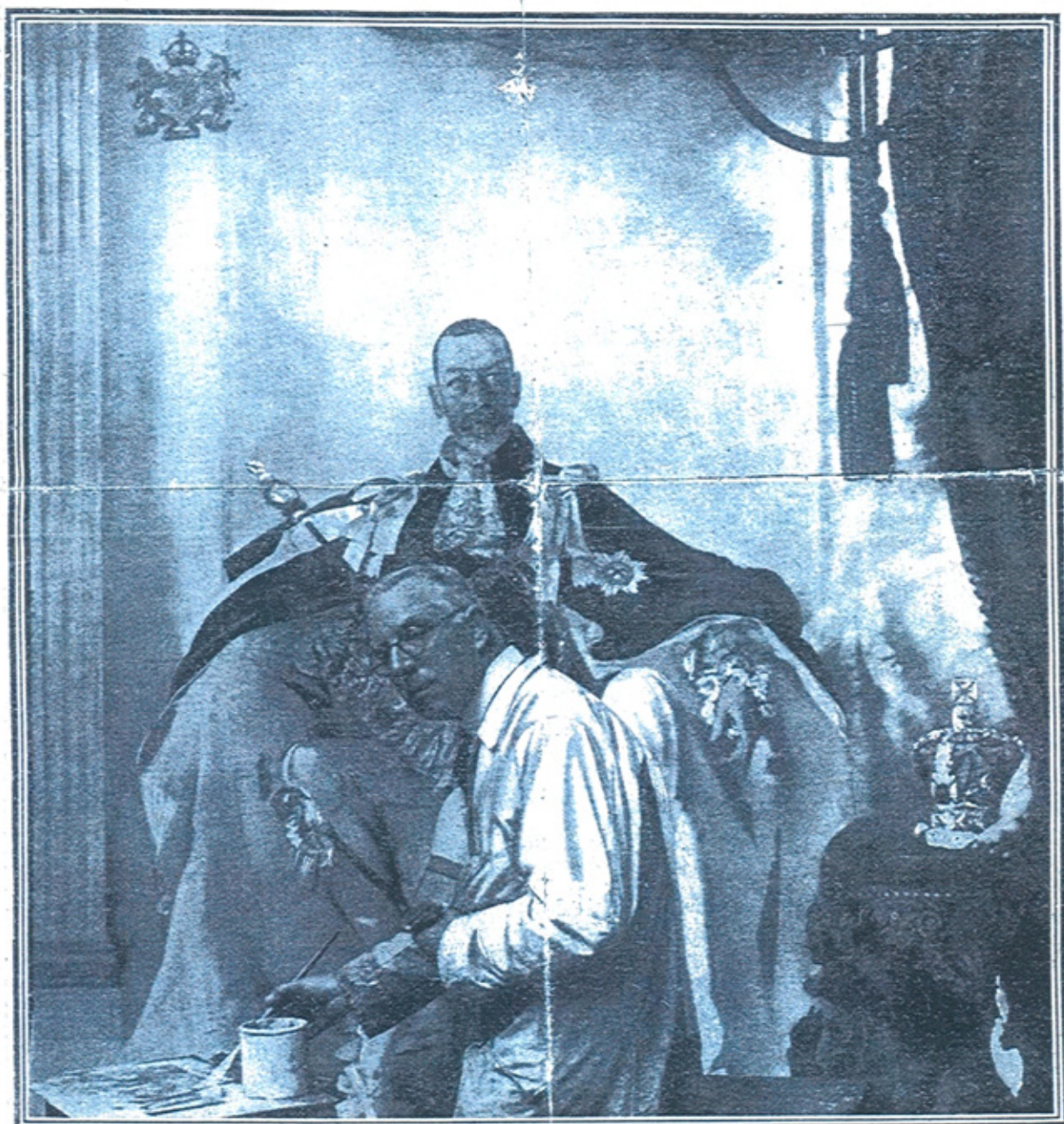
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Registered as
a Newspaper.

MONDAY, MARCH 31, 1924.

ONE PENNY

MR. SIMS, R.A., COMPLETES "THE PICTURE OF THE YEAR."



exclusive "Daily Graphic" photograph of Mr. Charles Sims, R.A., completing his portrait of the King, which will be one of the features of this year's Royal Academy. The picture has been painted at the Royal Academy from studies made at sittings in Buckingham Palace. The King has not yet seen it.

Fig.133 *Daily Graphic*, Charles Sims painting King George V, March 31st 1924



Fig.134 CS, Sketch of Crown for *King George V*, c1924, watercolour on paper, archive GB3025/1/4/164



Fig.135 Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV*, 1701, oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris

At around the same time in 1924 Sims was one of 8 artists commissioned to create mural decorations for the walls of St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster.⁷⁸ Decorative painting had, according to Harold Speed, preoccupied him since his return to London in 1915, and it was in this genre that he could further explore elements of design.⁷⁹ The aim of the St. Stephen's Hall project was didactic – the artists were instructed to produce images of key events in the nation's history that could ultimately be reproduced 'on the walls of every school in the Empire, telling the story of the Building of Britain.'⁸⁰ The series of paintings would be linked by the now fashionable appropriation of a primitive Italian style - specifically that of Piero della Francesca – in this case not motivated simply by a taste for restrained formal elements, but also political association: an implicit correlation between the British and Roman empires.⁸¹ The British School at Rome was inaugurated to train painters in the methods of the Italian fresco painters – most of the artists involved in the St. Stephen's Hall scheme were either tutors at the school, or recent graduates. Sims was an exception in that he was not involved with the school. His selection was due in part to his contribution to the Imperial War Museum's proposed Hall of Remembrance - D. Y. Cameron who partnered him in this project was on the St. Stephen's Hall selection committee - and partly to his sympathy with the *quattrocento* preoccupations exhibited in his *Seven Sacraments*. In this project, however, the decorative style that he adopted owed more to 15th century sources, specifically the first panel of Paolo Uccello's *Rout of San Romano* triptych, which hung in the National Gallery and had been cited as a model for the Hall of Remembrance artists.⁸² This was another serious misjudgement on Sims' part – his panel stood out from the rest of the scheme as inappropriately dynamic and realistic.

His contribution, *King John, confronted by his Barons assembled in force at Runnymede, gives unwilling consent to Magna Carta, the foundation of justice and individual freedom in England, 1215*, [fig.136] was the most controversial of the series. Other artists, George Clausen, Glyn Philpot, Colin Gill, Vivian Forbes, A. K. Lawrence, William Rothenstein and W. T. Monnington, all to some extent sympathetic to *quattrocento* principles, produced static *tromp l'oeil* tableaux vivantes whereas Sims' panel was animated and chaotic. His composition was close to that of the Uccello [fig.137], especially in his formal use of diagonal lances and spears. According to George Sheringham, writing in *The Studio* in 1922, Uccello had been dismissed as an unsuccessful realist as opposed to a decorative painter, largely because of his experiments with perspective. Sheringham insisted that decoration had been Uccello's primary aim. For him, the figure of the dead knight prostrate in the left foreground of *The Rout of San Romano* was far from an attempt at realism, but was included purely for decorative purposes, for 'he died in the interest of perspective and the cause of great composition.'⁸³ One of the preliminary drawings in Sims' sketchpad [fig.138] shows an alternative to the central figure struggling with the standard, he has drawn a figure lying on the ground, the soles of the shoes facing up and out towards the viewer in the same fashion as those of Uccello's knight. Clearly, he referred closely to the earlier work but ultimately must have had second thoughts about the irreverence of this idea. Sims may have adopted Uccello's composition and certain stylistic and rhythmical elements, but again he approached his panel from an individual perspective, attempting to integrate a specific decorative style with a dramatic narrative. He emphasised the emotional drama of the scene by setting it in lashing rain and wind. The Papal staff, snapped by the storm, has come crashing down into the foreground of the composition, engulfing a struggling figure in the sodden fabric of the standard and striking another on the chin.⁸⁴

If his *Magna Carta* is compared to the next most dynamic in the group of paintings, Colin Gill's *King Alfred's Longships*, the treatment of the weather alone illustrates Sims' invention and imagination. Sims' rainstorm, for Harold Speed, was 'something quite new in Western art... a most successful use of a Japanese convention,' and was so much more dramatic and evocative than Gill's rather feeble 'puffing zephyr.'⁸⁵ Preliminary pencil studies in the archive reveal the intensity of energetic action Sims planned – the drawings are full of life, in places using a continuous line, and furious hatching across the entire composition symbolises the rain. This energy, dynamism and indeed format, perhaps even relates to the Futurist concerns of Boccioni's *The City Rises*, to which Sims may also have alluded.⁸⁶ But for *The Times* it fell 'below the level of the rest... [and] the treatment' was 'more atmospheric than it should be,' although the 'agitating composition... [brought] to mind... El Greco.'⁸⁷ Harold Speed knew that Sims 'felt a little hurt that this fine performance was not more generously received' and in Speed's opinion the panel represented 'as vital a piece of modern historical painting as we have had for a long time.'⁸⁸ The problem, as Clare Willsdon has remarked recently, was that 'a situation had been reached where "no controversy" was regarded as in practice equivalent to "no reality."⁸⁹ Sims had again misjudged what was required of him; his adopted *cinquecento* style was too scholarly, too reliant on the sophistication of his audience and, given its setting, wholly inappropriate.⁹⁰ This was another very public failure for a man rapidly losing professional self-esteem.

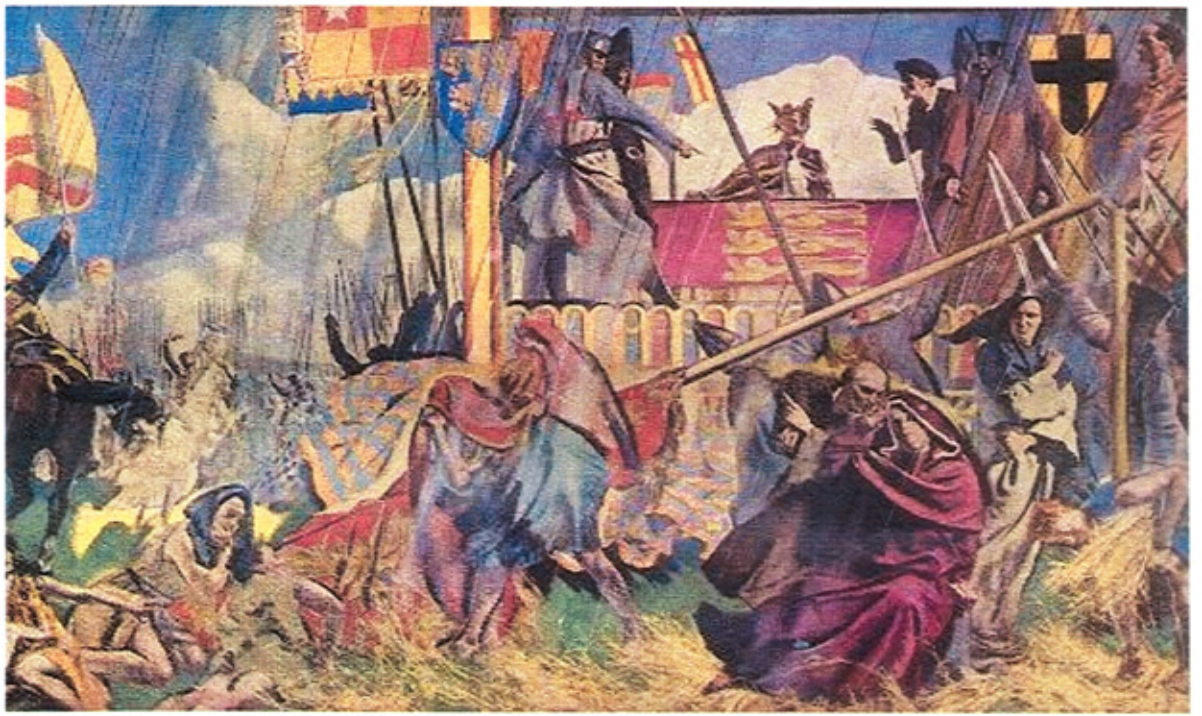


Fig.136 CS, *King John, confronted by his Barons assembled in force at Runnymede, gives unwilling consent to Magna Carta, the foundation of justice and individual freedom in England, 1215.* c1924, tempera on canvas, St. Stephen's Hall, Palace of Westminster, London



Fig.137 Paolo Uccello, *The Rout of San Romano*, c1438-40, oil on panel, National Gallery, London, purchased in 1857.

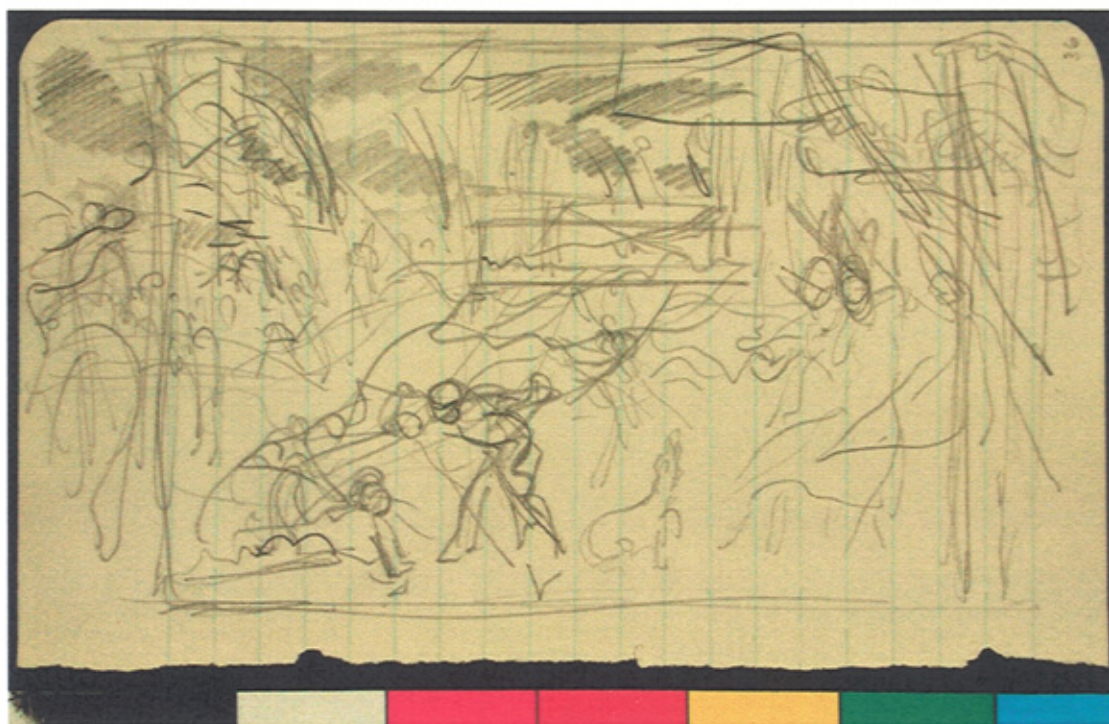


Fig.138 CS, Sketchpad study for *Signing of Magna Carta*, c.1924, graphite on paper, archive GB3025/4/2p.36

In September 1925 Sims travelled to America. His choice to spend a prolonged period there has been described as a retreat, or even a flight, from the continued controversy surrounding the George V portrait and his role as Keeper of the Academy.⁹¹ Scarce information survives of Sims' movements whilst there, we do know however that his work was well received when he showed at the Knoedler Galleries, New York in 1925. This exhibition included his portrait of George V which he had withdrawn from the Academy, prompting an ongoing campaign to return the painting to Britain for its destruction. Reviews concentrated on this by now 'notorious' portrait, and that of Sybil Rocksavage.⁹² American audiences were only familiar with these two paintings and then only because of the publicity surrounding them. Sims began to develop a name for portraiture in America, and when he returned in 1926 it seems he had resolved to exploit this success.⁹³ Most of the critics agreed that the surprise and success of the

Knoedler show was in his mother and child subjects, especially the watercolours – their apparent ‘Englishness’ appealed to 1920s Americans:

His metier is that of a painter of lovely ladies and fair children, of sunlight and flowers. His children are rosy transparencies against sunlit windows or green backgrounds of garden and field. His ladies, whether they are portraits or not, have an Ariel-like impalpability... he is a distinguished carrier of the tradition in English water-color painting.⁹⁴

He returned to New York for a prolonged period the subsequent year – having now begun to retreat from the Academy following the rejections of his portraiture and his growing antipathy to its stifling atmosphere under the presidency of Frank Dicksee.⁹⁵

The institution’s hierarchy were incensed that Sims had taken the King’s portrait and shown it to an American audience. Letters passed back and forth throughout the spring of 1926 culminating in the agreement that Sims would hand over the portrait and all associated rights to the Academy administration on the payment of 750 guineas. The next recorded correspondence was a telegram, in which Sims explained that he would be remaining in America for a time and would therefore be absent from the Schools for the beginning of the academic year.⁹⁶ The unpleasantness arising from this episode led to Sims’ resignation from his position as Keeper on November 8th. On March 21st 1927 the President, witnessed by the Secretary and the Registrar, cut the head from Sims’ portrait of George V and burned it. This act of vandalism was sanctioned by the King himself, indeed he ‘expressed great satisfaction with what had been done,’ later requesting that the rest of the painting be similarly destroyed.⁹⁷ This extraordinary episode of authoritarian intervention is evidence of the increasingly reactionary stance adopted by the Royal Academy later in the 1920s and 30s. The nearest equivalent is perhaps that of Sir William Llewellyn (then President) in 1935 and his refusal to sign the petition organised to preserve Jacob Epstein’s BMA statues.⁹⁸ Llewellyn, representing the Academy, led the team assigned to ‘secure’ the statues – in reality the

vandals that dismembered and destroyed them.⁹⁹ The well-documented cases of the defacement of Epstein's *Rima* in Kensington Gardens, also illustrate the intensity of reaction provoked by art during this period.¹⁰⁰ However, Sims' *King George V* remains probably unique in its status as a work of art purchased by an institution with the express purpose of its destruction.¹⁰¹

His contribution to the Academy of 1926 was a satirical comment on the fashionable society with which he was rapidly losing patience. *The Studio of a Painter of Fêtes Galantes* [figs.139-40] depicts the debauched hedonistic interior of, Sims suggests, the painter who prostitutes himself to Society's tastes. The composition borrows heavily from yet another decorative idiom – in this case over-blown Rococo. The magnificently ornate ceiling and bed canopy were thinly disguised quotations from the State Rooms at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.¹⁰² The artist 'performs' in the centre of the room surrounded by ladies and gentlemen posing in Regency costumes. The silk-lined proscenium arch on the back wall emphasises the artificiality of the scene, giving it clear theatrical connotations. The nymphs and allegorical figures flitting around on the ceiling are similar to those he had recently painted in Queen Mary's Dolls House: the room by association is as artificial and meaningless as this.¹⁰³

Sims' *Studio of a Painter* can also perhaps be compared to two of his friend Orpen's paintings: his *Fair at Neuilly*, RA 1925 [fig.141], and the far earlier, but recently acquired by Sybil Rocksavage, *Play Scene from 'Hamlet'*.¹⁰⁴ The compositions are similar, all depicting some kind of spectacle viewed from a distance, all make use of theatrical architecture as framing device. *Hamlet* used recognisable characters, Orpen's student friends, stressing the artificiality of the construct by juxtaposing real and

theatrical elements. His *Fair at Neuilly* is a disturbing scene of a chained polar bear in a boxing ring, baited into fighting with spectators. His keeper beats him with a stick in order to rile his temper. Bruce Arnold rather incongruously described this painting as an example of 'objective realism' and as Orpen's return to subject painting after the succession of 20s portraits.¹⁰⁵ He argues that the painting 'should not be read as satire,' and that Orpen had 'no message beyond the message of actuality.'¹⁰⁶ A contemporary *Punch* cartoon, reproduced by Arnold, depicts Orpen in the stance of the bear's keeper – his paintbrush taking the place of the stick, his combative stance and fixed stare challenging his canvas into reaction to the hungry spectators' blood-lust. But surely the painting exhibits rather Orpen's increasing weariness at the role of society portrait painter - any empathy he feels for one of his painted characters is not for the baiter but for the bear. Surrounded by caricatured drunken spectators, the bear is coerced to perform against his will and out of his element. Like Sims' effeminate painter in the *Studio of a Painter*, Orpen's bear is dancing to another's tune, both artists are expressing their growing disillusionment with their role as court entertainers, their place on what John Rothenstein called the 'golden treadmill.'¹⁰⁷ Both paintings reveal the artists' personal demons and conflicts lurking beneath the assumed respectability of their roles – depression, fractured personal lives, and a compulsion to unmask the decadence and amorality of the smart set they moved in. In Sims' case, although the painting reveals his increasing (or perhaps returning) anti-authoritarianism, it is also evidence of his confusion, his quest for a subject appropriate to life in the twenties. If none was forthcoming then bitter satire would take its place. This was a period fascinated by historical and theatrical pastiche and conflicted identities; of the Baroque-Elizabethan-Modern world of Cecil Beaton and the Sitwells, the pulsating rhythms and screaming melodies of Gershwin, and T. S. Eliot's fragmentary *Waste Land*.¹⁰⁸ In

Façade, Edith Sitwell's collaboration with the young composer William Walton, conflicting influences were very nearly amalgamated in the combination of experimental expressionist poetry, the timbre of English nursery rhymes, and the blending of popular syncopated rhythms, all presented with an element of knowing self-awareness that owed a debt to Dada.¹⁰⁹ Orpen and Sims' experiments, struggles and disillusionment during this period were not unusual, Eliot's prophetic personification of confusion, turmoil and fear of aging in J. Alfred Prufrock would sum up the spirit of the generation now too old to be identified as 'bright young things.'¹¹⁰



Fig.139 CS, *The Studio of a Painter of Fêtes Galantes*, RA 1926, tempera on canvas, Private Collection



Fig.140 CS, Study for *The Studio of a Painter of Fêtes Galantes*, 1926, mixed media on paper, archive GB3025/1/4/73



Fig.141 William Orpen, *Fair at Neuilly*, RA 1925, oil on canvas, Private Collection

In the mid 20s both Sims and Orpen also made self-portraits that were strikingly deprecatory in tone. Orpen's 1924 drawing, titled *Orpsie Boy you're not as young as you were my lad!* shows himself as a rather pathetic figure – aging and going to seed, with immaculately arranged thinning hair and a foppish bow tie. Obviously drawn from his reflection in a mirror, the image is dominated by the artist's steely gaze which seems to transfix the viewer, willing him or her to look away. Sims' own portrait is an unfinished oil sketch, now in the possession of the family, and makes similar use of the penetrating glare inherent when working from one's own reflection.¹¹¹ He used very little detail – the rims of his spectacles are barely sketched as glints of light and the background is hastily washed in – this was a man trying to look through the outward appearance of his rapidly aging face to reveal the thoughts and experiences behind. There is nothing particularly unusual about ageing artists making searchingly critical self-portraits – the tradition spans art history, from Rembrandt to Warhol and beyond – the interest here lies in the timing of the two pictures. Both were created at the time of their authors' greatest commercial success in portraiture, as if this soul-searching was a necessary foil to the formulaic monotony of the society portraits both were engaged upon. Both artists were growing increasingly weary with the hierarchies and hypocrisies surrounding them.

Sims, ever more depressed and demoralised, relinquished his rooms in Burlington House in June 1926. He did not return to his wife and children – by this stage his marriage was dead in all but name – but embarked upon a series of foreign trips and long-term spells as a guest in the homes of his friends.¹¹² In letters to Katharine Younger, dating from June and July 1927, transcriptions of which are in the archive, he revealed his growing weariness with the fashionable art scene, 'Rather tired of the

bright young men and their brilliant way of saying nothing.’¹¹³ Having tried, and failed, to secure himself and his work a place in the 1920s English cultural establishment and to effect a change in accepted attitudes at the Academy which was immediately overturned on Dicksee’s election as President, he retreated inwards.¹¹⁴ He had begun to sketch and plan for what would be his final series of paintings, the *Spirituals*, in which he attempted the creation of yet another idyll - this time not associated with the landscape, or even with Christianity – but now with the soul’s escape from the failing body.

¹ Sims Studio Diary, September 12th 1919, p.129.

² In 1924 Sims was the Head of the Hanging Committee.

³ Alan Sims, op. cit., p.124.

⁴ The letter also refers to Orpen’s awkward dealings with Lord Leverhulme who notoriously refused to pay the agreed rate for the full-length portrait he had commissioned because Orpen had depicted him sitting down.

⁵ Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, c. end of July 1920 in *Poet and Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910-1946*, eds. Claude Collier Abbott and Anthony Bertram, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, p.122.

⁶ Sims, as cited in Harold Speed, ‘Charles Sims RA,’ op. cit., p.57. Although Sims had consistently exhibited in the Academy shows, and until the *Spirituals* his work would not seemed overtly modern in style or content, he was regarded by his contemporaries as a welcome rogue element in a stuffy institution.

⁷ Sims, as cited in Speed, *ibid.* The 1921 Summer exhibition was popularly labelled the ‘Flapper Exhibition’ due to the amount of young female exhibitors.

⁸ *The Times*, May 3rd 1921, p.6. Letter to the Editor.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Rutter was a founding member of the Allied Artists Association in 1908 and an early supporter of English Futurism.

¹¹ Frank Rutter, *Sunday Times*, May 1921, no date or page number, SSS.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The hanging committee of 1921 also included D. Y. Cameron, Adrian Stokes and Arnesby Brown – all recently appointed Academicians. The 1921 exhibition attracted 168,071 paying visitors – the highest attendance of the decade until 1927. The 1919 show had attracted more – 199,489 – presumably due to the exhibition of Sargent’s *Gassed*, on loan from the Imperial War Museum and popularly named ‘Picture

of the Year.' Figures are cited in Theo Cowdell, *The Role of the Royal Academy in English Art 1918-1930*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to London University, 1980, Appendix K.

¹⁴ Brandon Taylor attributes this to the influence of Aston Webb, the President of the Academy from 1921-24, and claims that in 1924, when Frank Dicksee took over the presidency, the process of modernisation observed in previous years was reversed. Dicksee, staunchly conservative and according to Taylor even fascist, advised the students to be vigilant against degenerate – ie foreign or modernist – infiltration, emphasising that their 'ideal of beauty must be the white man's.' As cited in Brandon Taylor, 'Foreigners and Fascists: Patterns of Hostility to Modern Art in Britain before and after the First World War,' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell, eds. *Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p.189.

¹⁵ The accommodation at Burlington House was designed for single men and so, as John Sims has pointed out, their living conditions must have been rather cramped. Alan of course was by this stage a young man and spent little time actually living there, but in 1920 Peter was still only eleven years old.

¹⁶ Harold Speed, op. cit., p.57. Sims began to spend more and more time with Vivienne Jeudwine, the summer holidays were no longer spent with Agnes and the boys and most tellingly, from 1920 onwards he spent Christmas away. On November 12th 1920, Vivienne Jeudwine gave birth to a son, Wynne. There is no direct proof that Sims was the father of the boy, however it is likely that he was. As Wynne grew older Sims painted numerous pictures of him and in these he reverted to the Impressionistic technique he had employed to paint his other three sons. Paintings such as *Balloons* and *The Necklace*, both of Wynne (and in the latter, his mother) were exhibited at the RWS in Winter 1924. Wynne became a famous book collector, was very interested in antique drawings and wrote a book about theatrical designs, *Stage Designs*, Middlesex: RIBA in assoc. with Hamlyn Publishing, 1968. He died in January 1985, see *The Times*, January 24th 1985, p.14.

¹⁷ As recorded in Laurence Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn: The Life of Rex Whistler*, London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1985, p.45. Whistler's evidence is not entirely reliable, his book was written sixty years after the fact, if fact it was – Rex Whistler famously failed his Academy examinations and removed to the Slade, his account is possibly tinged with bitterness.

¹⁸ The painting proved popular and sold on Viewing Day. Speed exhibited at the RA 1893-1955, Morley, 1905-1944, Board, 1902-24, Appleyard 1900-33, and Tatham 1916-61.

¹⁹ Cayley Robinson's *Pastoral*, 1923-24 was purchased by the Chantrey Bequest for the Tate Gallery in 1924.

²⁰ The Gypsy model used by Munnings in his *Gypsy Life* c1920, first shown at the Alpine Club Gallery in 1921 who wears an apron and large hooped earrings. Connard suggests that his figures are self-knowing and aware of the artifice of their costume and setting – they are young and moneyed and can afford to play-act in this bohemian manner.

²¹ Munnings' *Tagg's Island*, which was in the Academy show of 1920, depicts a group of young people at a 'bottle party' on the Thames island. For Kenneth McConkey this was a return to Sargent's 'world of *dolce far niente*, ' of low evening sunlight and solipsistic relaxation; it is also, however, an illustration of a specific cultural and temporal locale – it could certainly not be mistaken for an Edwardian scene. See Kenneth McConkey, 'English the scene... English the atmosphere,' in *An English Idyll: A Loan Exhibition of Works by Sir Alfred Munnings*, London: Sotheby's Catalogue, 2001, pp.8-27, p.100.

²² Gorbio and Mentone are in the Côte d'Azur region of Southern France.

²³ Frank Rutter, *Sunday Times*, May 1921, op. cit.

²⁴ David Peters Corbett, op. cit., pp.73-4.

²⁵ See Frank Rutter, 'The Triumph of Design' in *Evolution in Modern Art*, London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd, 1926, pp.129-148. Cited from p.142.

²⁶ This painting also relates to Sims' design for the War Memorials Tapestry Guild exhibited at Agnew's in June 1919. Entitled *Dawn*, this design made use of a similar colour scheme and depicts a series of graves in a quasi-Japanese landscape with sunrise – a study is in the archive.

²⁷ Sims Studio Diary, March 26th 1920, p.139.

²⁸ This was a significant development in Sims' technique. In a painting like *The Fountain* of 1908, we have already examined his method of being led by the paint, of allowing the materials to form the composition in the manner of the Impressionist painters. By 1920 evidently he was trying to move away from this, developing his compositions from the rigid framework experimented with in the *Seven Sacraments*.

²⁹ In *Epilogue*, Sims makes explicit reference to the Three Graces motif previously buried in the midst of his *Wood Beyond the World*.

³⁰ See Campbell Dodgson, 'The Engraved Work of Charles Sims RA,' in *The Print Collector's Quarterly*, date unknown (c.1930) pp.375-87. Sims was not alone in his interest in printmaking during this period – Paul Nash experimented with wood engraving techniques, whilst the young Graham Sutherland produced a series of pastoral etchings influenced by Blake and Palmer. See Gordon Cooke, *Graham Sutherland: Early Etchings*, London, 1993. Sutherland held the first exhibition of his etchings at The Twenty One Gallery in 1924 – coincidentally at this time the landscape he depicted was around the town of Littlehampton, the same area of West Sussex that had so inspired Sims before the Great War.

³¹ 1913. One of a series of experiments depicting girls and infants against a low horizon silhouetted against the sky.

³² Sims' Studio Diary op. cit., p.139.

³³ See Clive Bell's *Art*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Capricorn Books, 1914.

³⁴ Ibid., p.141 also cited in Beverly H. Twitchell, *Cezanne and Formalism in Bloomsbury*, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987, p.110.

³⁵ For example, Roger Fry's definition of classicism, especially in relation to Cézanne, was that it '[did] not rely... upon associated ideas, as [did]... Romantic[ism] and Realis[m].' Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1920, also cited in Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London: Harper and Row, 1982, p.90.

³⁶ The figures in the sketch are nude whilst in the version exhibited in the RA they wear Augustus John's Dorelia-like headscarves.

³⁷ Sargent's portrait of Lady Aline Sassoon was completed in 1907 whilst he made paintings and drawings of Sybil in 1910, 1912, 1913 and 1922. Orpen painted Philip and Sybil in 1912, *The Drawing Room at 25 Park Lane*, and Sybil alone in 1913. Philpot painted Philip in 1913 and, like Rex Whistler, was commissioned to decorate his lavish houses in the 20s and 30s. Sims also decorated 25 Park Lane for Philip Sassoon. See Peter Stansky, *Sassoon: The Worlds of Philip and Sybil*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.

³⁸ Robert Fleming was a successful banker, his wife had also been painted by Orpen during the war, and they were major art collectors.

³⁹ Peter Stansky names amongst their recorded house-guests T. E. Lawrence, Winston Churchill, Edward Prince of Wales, Wallis Simpson, Chamberlain and amazingly, given the family's Jewish background, Oswald Mosley. Philip Sassoon was Douglas Haig's private secretary during the Great War and later mounted a political career of his own.

⁴⁰ 25 Park Lane had been the family home and was inherited by Philip. After her marriage Sybil moved out but as Philip did the majority of the entertaining, it is feasible that Sims could have been invited there by either of them.

⁴¹ See Peter Stansky, *op. cit.*, p.83. Agnes Sims also records Sybil and her husband coming 'to look at pictures' on July 24th 1915. Orpen's letter is dated June 11th 1925 and was written from Paris. John Sims met the Marchioness in the 1970s as an elderly woman and, on their introduction, she made it clear how much of shock Sims' death had been to her, and that his relationship with Vivienne Jeudwine had been common knowledge to her set.

⁴² His sketchpads contain small thumbnail studies in pencil and watercolour, trying out compositions and colour schemes for portrait commissions. There are no surviving studies for *The Countess of Rocksavage* in particular, but there are others from the same period.

⁴³ *Daily Mail*, undated, 1922, SSS.

⁴⁴ Alan Sims, *op. cit.*, p.102. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, undated, 1922, SSS.

⁴⁵ Charles Sims in Sims *op. cit.*, p.122.

⁴⁶ See Bruce Arnold, *Orpen: Mirror to an Age*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1981, p.284.

⁴⁷ As cited in *ibid.*, p.285.

⁴⁸ In *ibid.*, p.393.

⁴⁹ James Laver, *Portraits in Oil and Vinegar*, 1925, p.183, as cited in Kenneth McConkey, *Edwardian Portraits: Images of an Age of Opulence*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987, p.56.

⁵⁰ See McConkey, *Edwardian Portraits*, *ibid.*, p.16.

⁵¹ *Times*, undated review, SSS.

⁵² Peter Stansky, *op. cit.*, p.170.

⁵³ The Sassoons, and Sybil in particular were regular visitors to the Riviera. Stansky mentions that Sybil and her husband were often participants in the Monte Carlo rally. See Stansky, *ibid.*, p.183.

⁵⁴ Agnes Sims records Charles' visit to Monte Carlo from December 12th 1924 until January 5th 1925. Interestingly she spent time there herself the following February, after his return to England. He visited France again in July and August 1925 although there is no record of exactly where he stayed. His final series of letters to Mrs. Younger in February and March 1928 are from Cap Martin and San Remo.

⁵⁵ Douglas Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and some Personal Memories*, London: Nicholson and Watson, 1945, pp.232-237.

⁵⁶ The architecture is similar to that of Lavery's *Villa Sylvia* painted in 1920 at Cap Ferrat just along the coast from Monte Carlo and Nice.

⁵⁷ When the house was originally built the dining room was clad in lapis lazuli with an 'opalescent ceiling,' (Stansky, *op. cit.*, p.46) but this was later modified under Sargent's advice to the colour of a 'chow.' (*Ibid.*, p.148). Philip Tilden, architect of the post-war modifications to Port Lympne, as quoted in *ibid.*, p.148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Fig. 41, p.149. John Cornforth describes these chairs as gilt with 'jade coloured cushions,' another point in common with Sims' painting. Cornforth, *The Search for a Style: Country Life and Architecture, 1897-1935*, London: Andre Deutsch in association with Country Life, 1988, p.192.

⁵⁹ Madeleine Vionnet's designs were famous for their bias-cut drapery influenced by Classical (particularly Greek) lines. Her dresses were particularly popular during the 1920s and 30s with stars such as Marlene Dietrich. See Jacqueline Demornex, *Madeleine Vionnet*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

⁶⁰ As cited in Stansky, op. cit., p.144.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, p.144.

⁶² *Daily Chronicle*, May 1st 1922.

⁶³ These included a portrait of Winston Churchill's two daughters, Diana and Sarah. The Churchill Papers archive (Churchill College, Cambridge) holds correspondence between Sims and Churchill on the subject of this painting. Churchill was dissatisfied with the finished work.

⁶⁴ *Punch*, 'Royal Academy – Second Depressions,' unknown date, (May 1924).

⁶⁵ Although less formal, Vivienne Jeudwine is no less fashionable than Lady Rocksavage. The brushstrokes describing the pattern of leaves on her dress are heavy and distinct suggesting a beaded or sequinned motif – again the height of contemporary fashion.

⁶⁶ Even in the title he betrays the painting's links to *The Countess of Rocksavage*. What better way could the reputation of this society divorcee with an (allegedly) illegitimate son be raised than by comparison to Lady Rocksavage (by 1924 the Marchioness of Cholmondeley)? Vivienne Jeudwine's decree absolute was granted on January 16th 1923. Although the 1920s saw a prevalence of divorce cases, with The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 and other reforms leading to record numbers of divorces towards the end of the century, it was still not socially acceptable in more traditional circles. For a discussion of the statistics involved see Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1940, pp.105-6.

⁶⁷ *Telegraph*, undated, 1924, SSS.

⁶⁸ *The Times* undated, 1924, SSS, and the *Telegraph*, undated, 1924, SSS.

⁶⁹ Walter Sickert, *Southport Visitor*, SSS, May 10th 1924.

⁷⁰ *Daily Express*, *Daily...* (indecipherable) and *Chronicle* respectively. All are undated, c1924, SSS.

⁷¹ As quoted by the *Daily Express*, op. cit. In 1924 the King was 59 years old.

⁷² Sims had made him look too old and the depiction of his legs made him appear fey and fairy-like.

⁷³ Alan Sims, op. cit., p.126. When asked for his opinion, Sims' old adversary Salisbury, who had himself painted portraits of George V, replied that he 'would rather not say anything about the picture.' Unknown publication, SSS. Salisbury's submission to the 1921 Academy that he had complained so bitterly about was "And they buried him among the Kings," *Westminster Abbey*, November 11th 1920. This depicted the burial of the Unknown Soldier and showed George V as the chief mourner. Salisbury was reputed to be one of the King's favourite painters, and was later commissioned to paint both George V and Queen Mary. His paintings were exactly what Sims would have meant by 'too conventional.'

⁷⁴ Frank Rutter, *The Little Book of the Royal Academy*, London: 1924, p.55.

⁷⁵ Kenneth McConkey, *Edwardian Portraits*, op. cit., p.17.

⁷⁶ Clare Ousley, 'His Majesty's Legs,' *The New York Herald*, undated, 1924, SSS.

⁷⁷ Brandon Taylor, op. cit., p.198. The next high profile portrait that Sims produced also caused controversy, but this time of a more political kind. His *Introduction of Lady Astor to the Speaker of the House of Commons*, depicted the first female Member of Parliament being led through the House of Commons by Lord Balfour and Lloyd George. The controversy surrounding the hanging of the painting

centred on the argument that works depicting living Members of Parliament should not be hung in the House of Commons. Anxious to avoid further adverse publicity, Sims settled the argument by withdrawing the painting. This was a further blow, the second large-scale portrait commission rejected in a year.

⁷⁸ The project was embarked upon in 1924 and was unveiled in 1927.

⁷⁹ Harold Speed, op. cit., p.59. Sims was also approached to make a design for one of the Royal Exchange panels although there is no record of a date for this. Speed mentions the episode and describes the rejection of his design as 'another stab' (Speed, p.59). The meticulously worked out design survives in the archive. He had also produced a 40ft long panel for the wartime *Arts and Crafts* exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1916, described by C. Lewis Hind as 'powerful and learned' (*Daily Chronicle*, 1917, SSS) and the *Glasgow Herald* as 'sporting with Tiepolo and Michelangelo.' (Undated review, SSS). Sadly destroyed with the other contributions after the show, although there is a photograph of it in the archive, the panel now serves to highlight Sims' eagerness to accept the challenge of mural decoration. This interest continued and developed, due in no small part to the artist's experiments with tempera painting – traditionally the medium of the fresco painter.

⁸⁰ W. H. Whitley, Speaker of the House of Commons, speech reported in *The Times* 6th May, 1929, as cited in Clare A. P. Willson, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000., p.131. John Sims can remember reproductions of the images in the dining hall of his prep school – he was fascinated by the contrast between Sims' painting and the others but at the time had no idea that the work was that of his grandfather as the images were not labelled.

⁸¹ Clare Willson, ibid., p.131.

⁸² Purchased by the National Gallery in 1857. See Meirion and Susie Harries, *The War Artists* op. cit., p.91.

⁸³ George Sheringham, 'The Innocence of Paolo Uccello,' *The Studio*, Vol.84, no.352, July, 1922, pp.3-6.

⁸⁴ For Harold Speed this element of humour was the 'Sims touch' op. cit., p.60.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.60 and Willson, op. cit., p.141.

⁸⁶ Boccioni's work had been exhibited widely by the 1920s. *The City Rises* was included in the *Italian Futurists* exhibition at the Sackville Galleries in 1912.

⁸⁷ *The Times*, June 28th 1927, p.11. The National Gallery had purchased *The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane* attributed to El Greco, in 1919. There was an exhibition of Spanish Painting at the Academy in 1920, including 10 El Grecos, and *The Times* published a photograph of the Prado's masterpiece, *The Resurrection*, in January 1924 (16th p.16).

⁸⁸ Speed, op. cit., p.60.

⁸⁹ Willson, op. cit., p.130.

⁹⁰ The painting did not prove popular on its unveiling in 1927, indeed its detractors went to the lengths of requesting its substitution 'by a more satisfactory picture' in the House of Lords. Sir Charles Oman, honourable member for Oxford University, as quoted by Alan Sims, in Sims, op. cit., p.126.

⁹¹ The Royal Academy records contain transcriptions of the minutes of the meetings detailing the continued correspondence between Sims and the Academy Council headed by Dicksee, the new President. Transcriptions in the archive were collated by Gillian Lee, Sims' great-niece.

⁹² *New York American*, undated, SSS.

⁹³ He left for America on September 11th 1926 and did not return to England until February 4th 1927 according to Agnes Sims' diary.

⁹⁴ *Brooklyn Eagle*, undated, SSS.

⁹⁵ John Sims recalls the rumour that at one point his grandfather had been in the running to succeed Aston Webb, this came to nothing but would explain Sims' attitude towards Dicksee. Alan Sims hints at his father's ambivalence towards Dicksee, describing his 'loss of interest in the Academy Schools under the new President.' Alan Sims, op. cit., p.127.

⁹⁶ This was the second year in a row that he had been absent from the opening of the Schools. The Council voted unanimously to write to him expressing their disapproval at his conduct.

⁹⁷ Royal Academy minutes, transcription by Gillian Lee op. cit., March 21st 1927. A month later this little ceremony took place in the boiler rooms of the Academy. Ibid., April 22nd 1927.

⁹⁸ The petition had been organised and circulated by representatives from other London art schools. Walter Sickert resigned from the RA in protest at Llewellyn's actions.

⁹⁹ See Richard Cork, 'Epstein's Statues in the Strand,' in *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early Twentieth Century England*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, pp.9-60.

¹⁰⁰ The white marble of *Rima* was covered in enamel paint in 1925, and tarred and feathered in 1929, both times by anonymous perpetrators. *The Times*, October 10th 1929, p.16.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of the attitudes towards 'Modern Art' in England, and especially the reactionary stance of the Royal Academy see Brandon Taylor, op. cit., pp.169-98.

¹⁰² See for example, the ceiling of the King's Audience Chamber and the King's Bed Chamber, both at Windsor Castle. A surviving sketch for this painting in the archive (GB3025/3/68) illustrates the careful planning involved in the composition and reveals subtle alterations in the final work. For example, the silk curtains in the background were originally planned as three ornate windows and the nimble sprite-like figure of the artist was originally drawn as a paunchy middle-aged man in a smock (possibly a self-portrait caricature). The drawing is in red crayon on canvas and appears to be a complete plan ready for the application of paint, although it was clearly abandoned and reworked on another support.

¹⁰³ Several Royal Academicians were enlisted to provide miniature paintings for the dolls' house, designed and built by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Other artists involved included D. Y. Cameron, William Nicholson, John and Paul Nash, William Orpen, Arthur Rackham, Laura Knight, George Clausen and C. R. W. Nevinson. Sims' contribution was the ceiling decoration in the Saloon, entitled *The Children of Rumour with Her Hundred Tongues*, a frieze of nude nymphs engaged in a game of 'Chinese whispers' and allegorical figures floating against a blue sky. See Mary Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary's Dolls' House*, London: The Bodley Head, 1988.

¹⁰⁴ The painting was slightly damaged in a bomb-blast on the Slade, where it had hung since its completion in c1899. Sybil Rocksavage 'rescued' it from further harm in 1918 and removed it to Houghton Hall.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold also suggests that it was Lady Rocksavage who talked Orpen into this departure, worried about his increasing ill-health and lack of self esteem. Arnold, op. cit., p.415.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters, Volume One: Sickert to Grant*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd., 1952, p.252.

¹⁰⁸ Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was first performed in 1924 in New York. T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* was published in 1922.

¹⁰⁹ The first public performance of *Façade* was in the Aeolian Hall, Bond Street on June 12th 1923.

¹¹⁰ T. S. Eliot's *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock* was first published in 1917. Prufrock sees 'the moment of [his] greatness flicker, and... the eternal Footman hold [his] coat and snicker' 'And in short, I was afraid.'

¹¹¹ The portrait now belongs to Torquil Macleod, the artist's great-grandson, Ann Tetlow's (née Sims) son.

¹¹² On June 14th Agnes recorded her visit to his rooms to select books, pictures etc. that she wished to keep. He was obviously not planning on returning home if they were dividing their possessions. Sims stayed most often with Percy Lumley-Ellis at Littlefield Manor, Surrey, and Katharine Younger at Ravenswood, St. Boswells, in the Scottish borders.

¹¹³ Paris, July 5th 1927.

¹¹⁴ Theo Cowdell suggested that the changes implemented after Sims' resignation 'might be interpreted as direct criticism of Sims' running of the Schools.' op. cit., p.57.

Chapter Six: *The Spirituals*

‘as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen’

In May 1928 Charles Sims' final series of paintings *The Spirituals* was shown in the 'Isolation Ward' of the Royal Academy exhibition.¹ The series was Sims' most overt attempt to represent emotion through abstracted pictorial means, a 'haunting vision of [the] Beauty of the Unseen,' and represents the artist's closest encounter with forms of avant-garde painting.² The six works appeared unlike anything he had exhibited before and provoked much controversy. Sims had committed suicide only three weeks before the opening and the Academy Hanging Committee tried to override his privileges as a member and exclude the paintings on the grounds that the artist was dead.³ Public and critical opinion was polarised with supporters and detractors alike proffering their opinions in the daily press. Terms such as 'mystical' and 'psychic' were bandied about in an attempt to categorise the paintings.⁴ Sims' critics made accusations of obvious insanity, whilst for his followers the series was 'tragic... full of the utmost pathos and sincerity,' and was compared to the visionary art of William Blake and El Greco, both undergoing review during the period.⁵ To Alan Sims it seemed that the paintings were a logical accumulation of his father's experiments and experiences, 'the unity of conception proved the climax to which his whole career had been leading him.'⁶ Sims' friend and influential critic P. G. Konody argued that 'the artist was never more logical and sane than when he applied himself to the composition of these remarkable mystic themes,' but for the Academy President, Sir Frank Dicksee, the paintings were 'in marked contrast to all his earlier work, and indicate[d] a violent change of mentality.'⁷ Dicksee revealed that the hanging committee was in disagreement, that 'some take the view that it would be kinder not to exhibit the pictures,' as they were perceived as non-

representative of Sims' oeuvre and, as such would not be a fitting memorial.⁸ It was generally felt that the paintings were an aberration, and that they were probably evidence of some form of mental breakdown or illness – a theory reinforced by his recent suicide. Frank Rutter pointed out the inherent hypocrisy in this criticism:

Sims was always attracted by imaginative subjects... so long as he kept to pagan and mythological subjects, nothing but praise was awarded to his imaginings; but when... his mind... occupied itself with mystic Christianity and religious ecstasy, then immediately there were people... who hastened to exclaim that his mind must have become unhinged.⁹

When the artist has been written about since the assumption of insanity has usually been accepted and expanded upon. His reputation and artistic standing has hinged on the negative publicity of his latter years and not on his successful career of the previous thirty.¹⁰ The purpose of this chapter is not to argue a case for his sanity – there is evidence that towards the end of his life Sims was certainly plagued by insomnia and depression - but rather that whatever his psychological state, the paintings were not aberrations. Indeed, it could be argued that elements of the series represent the closest Sims would achieve to his long-term ambition of the creation of an idyll removed from reality. The two factors that led to - and continue to foment - the controversy were that the works were perceived as different from anything Sims had produced previously, and that they were displayed in the conservative context of the Royal Academy. To put this differently, the problem was not in or of the paintings themselves but rather in whom they were by and where they were shown. If they had been shown, for example, in the Leicester Galleries, and had been attributed to Chagall or Kandinsky the reaction would perhaps have been more positive.¹¹ From the time of their original exhibition, the *Spirituals* have been inextricably entangled in the circumstances of the artist's life and more importantly his death, an artist moreover known for his breezy plein-airism, his *fêtes galantes*. This chapter will examine the ways in which the series represents a

logical continuation of Sims' preoccupations and concerns, both pre and post-war, and echoes the wider cultural climate of 20s Britain.

When, in November 1928, a series of the sketches and studies for the *Spirituals* was shown at Barbizon House, reviews were far more positive than at the exhibition of the finished works at the Academy, 7 months previously. For the *Times*, the 'most remarkable thing' about them was 'the great resemblance which they [had] to his ordinary works.'¹² The critic in *Colour* saw the exhibition as 'strangely moving' and recognised that the paintings were easier to understand when the sketches or 'the process of becoming' had been viewed.¹³ It has been argued that the *Spirituals* mark an abrupt shift in Sims' oeuvre prompted by the perceived watershed of the war and the death of his son.¹⁴ In fact, as we shall see, the series illustrates Sims' continuing ambition to integrate the ancient and modern from diverse sources in the creation of a discrete idyll. After rejecting the constraints of the life of an Academician this range of sources was greater than ever before: Sims allowed himself to expand his horizons to encompass elements of the broader field of visual culture other than fine art. The *Spirituals* were climactic, in the sense that to Sims they were the peak of his achievement, they did not - as I shall argue - symbolize a violent or uncharacteristic shift prompted by psychosis.

Sims' introspection, or an attempt to make some sense of the chaos of post-war Britain, was reflected in broader cultural developments throughout Europe, particularly in Germany with the development of Expressionism and artists' attempt to represent raw emotion through their technique and imagery. The war represented a shift in attitude towards the state of humanity, in particular towards authority, and the biting satire of,

for example, George Grosz and Otto Dix and the anarchic experiments of Dada were representative of angry anti-authoritarianism. For Sims, this rebellion against the establishment - particularly reflecting his uneasy relationship with the Academy in the late 20s after the fiasco surrounding his portrait of George V – did not have a political element, rather it took the form of allowing himself more freedom of expression, more eclecticism, more introspection. In other words, to be more ‘himself’ than ever before with little sense now of needing to relate to a particular audience.

As the last body of work that Sims produced it is useful to view the *Spirituals* as an accumulation of experiences and past influences.¹⁵ The series of six paintings shown in the Academy depicts a nude figure variously nurtured, bombarded or supported by another presence. This interaction takes place in a pulsating cloud of colour, sometimes with jagged rips revealing a space behind, see *My Pain Beneath Your Sheltering Hand*, [fig.142] sometimes obscured by translucent veils. The figures are stylized and the backgrounds exhibit aspects of an expressionistic abstraction. The departure from material reality is made overt by shifts in scale, particularly evident in *Man's Last Pretence of Consummation in Indifference*, [fig.143] where the tiny central figure is enfolded in the arms of a huge guardian, and *The Rebel Powers That Thee Array* [fig.144] where the scales are reversed – the outstretched figure's torso assailed by hordes of miniature beings. Sims has now moved far away from what he called ‘crass Naturalism’ towards depictions of his internal emotion.¹⁶ Sketchpads of the time, in the archive, bear witness to Sims' struggles to find an appropriate language to express his emotional and spiritual preoccupations. Brief notes and jottings describe his conclusions and illustrate his continued receptivity to experimentation. The *Spirituals*, would not use a Greek or Classical model, ‘too dull and usual,’ whilst referring to Eastern art was

'lazy.' Sims concluded that the best model to adopt would be, 'modern, vigorous, thoughtful, [and] alive.'¹⁷ The notes reveal just how significant Sims believed this body of work to be, he speaks of it in terms of a 'mission,' or even his 'calling.' He must put 'all [his] energy and wits... to this end,' he berates and encourages himself in the second person, 'even if you fail, an heroic failure,' as if the conception and creation of the paintings was somehow his destiny, that events were no longer in his hands. Sketches and jottings on scraps of graph paper, brown wrapping paper [see fig.145], tracing paper and even lined notepaper illustrate the obsessive degree to which the ideas occupied his every minute. He weighed up the pros and cons of remaining in London or establishing a life for himself in America, 'new country, solitude... nice food... become great person,' constantly returning to the importance of his own health as if the Herculean task ahead of him could only be undertaken at the peak of mental and physical fitness: 'Go where can do them best, in health.' In one of his letters to Katharine Younger, Sims spoke of 'hatching *Spirituals*,' as if he were literally nothing but an agent, an instrument necessary but ultimately irrelevant to their production.¹⁸



Fig.142 CS, *My Pain Beneath Your Sheltering Hand*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.143 CS, *Man's Last Pretence of Consummation in Indifference*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.144 CS, *The Rebel Powers that Thee Array*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

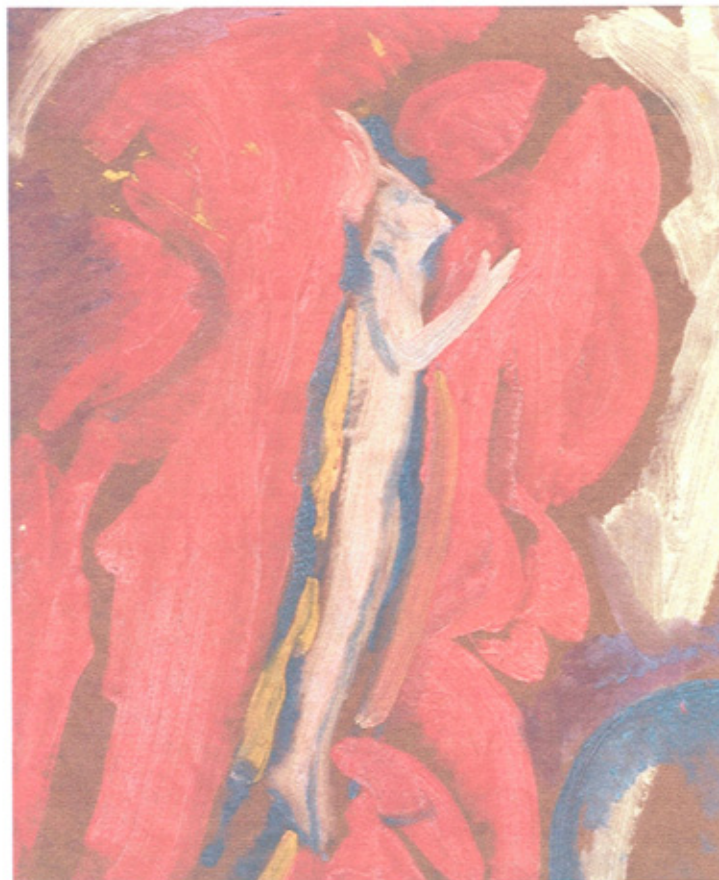


Fig.145 CS, *Study for Spirituals*, c1927, tempera on brown paper, archive GB3025/1/4/87

The experimental drawings in Sims' sketchpads, held in the archive, [figs.146-7] reveal an initial reliance on working from the life model, a male youth, drawn in a variety of dynamic and expressive poses. The artist encouraged himself to work from memory, believing that, for example, 'the violence [and] monstrosity of El Greco could not be [merely the] industrious copying from Nature,' however the memories must be based upon a solid foundation – it was vital to understand the form before advancing from it. For Sims, the work of Marie Laurencin (whom he mentions repeatedly) suffered from a lack of this understanding, 'she decorates surfaces with the slenderest knowledge of the figure.'¹⁹ Her dream-like paintings and designs had the *appearance* of the effect he was cultivating, but showed neither a true understanding of the human form, or the psychological expression he sought. Yet Sims was clearly if obliquely influenced by Laurencin's style, particularly perhaps in the mask-like faces and blacked-out eyes comparable particularly to his representation of the guardian figure in *Man's Last Pretence*, and the gestural balletic poses she favoured, clearest in his *Behold I Have Graven Thee on the Palm of My Hand* [fig.148]. When he was satisfied with the drawings from life, Sims' figure was gradually stylised and became progressively more androgynous, although even in the preliminary drawings the artist had obscured or excluded genitalia. Genderless angelic bodies would represent both an individual soul and universal humanity. The style of draughtsmanship was also carefully considered. The artist conceived the figures in linear terms; tonal hatching was employed usually to indicate the boundaries of the composition and to suggest the geometric shapes of the background. A list of preferred modes of drawing indicates that Sims was conscious that the style he used was crucial: 'What sort of drawing?' he asked himself, 'Realism, Beardsley, Renaissance, Egypt (only for repose), Rodin (just nature).'²⁰ Elsewhere he had noted that 'Gauguin colours and A. B. [Aubrey Beardsley] line' would be

appropriate idioms.²¹ The artist reveals his efforts to adapt and juxtapose existing conventions in the pursuit of 'congruent beauty,' a mission that had occupied his entire career. By this stage he had abandoned any reference to local colour, scribbled margin notes show an altogether more considered and selective approach towards the use of colour, 'Grey hands on yellow, Crimson border, Green halo to baby, Pink surround hands.'²² The mauves, lemons, pinks and maroons of the finished compositions immediately bring to mind a Kandinsky-like attempt to imbue the colours with another significance. For David Peters Corbett the palette was deliberately jarring to increase the sense of dis-ease, 'harshly coloured spatial environments impinging on the suffering individual.'²³ Sims' motives were simpler than this, he noted that 'modern color [*sic*] is Hue, not tinted light and shade,' his use of saturated colours was a conscious attempt to achieve the appearance of modernity.²⁴ For Peters Corbett, the failure of the *Spirituals* lies in this contrived effort to express a traditional religious subject by means of a deliberately adopted modern idiom. Sims still clung to narrative elements and the,

expressionist flashes and tears are additions to the descriptions of the symbolic figure he proposes, rather than integral to the conceptualization of the painting... the explicit subject-matter of the series was still the redemption of the sufferings of modernity through religious experience and consolation, rather than any attempt to use this new idiom to describe modernity itself.²⁵

He had adopted elements of the language of modernism without, for Peters Corbett, anything modern to actually say. If, by describing modernity we mean direct references to technology and the modern city – the physical evidence of modern innovation – then that might be justified. But if we accept that the representation of modern life in the 1920s is fundamentally centred around the emotional experience of dysphoric states, alienation, and loss of self, then perhaps Sims is explicitly portraying *his* modernity?

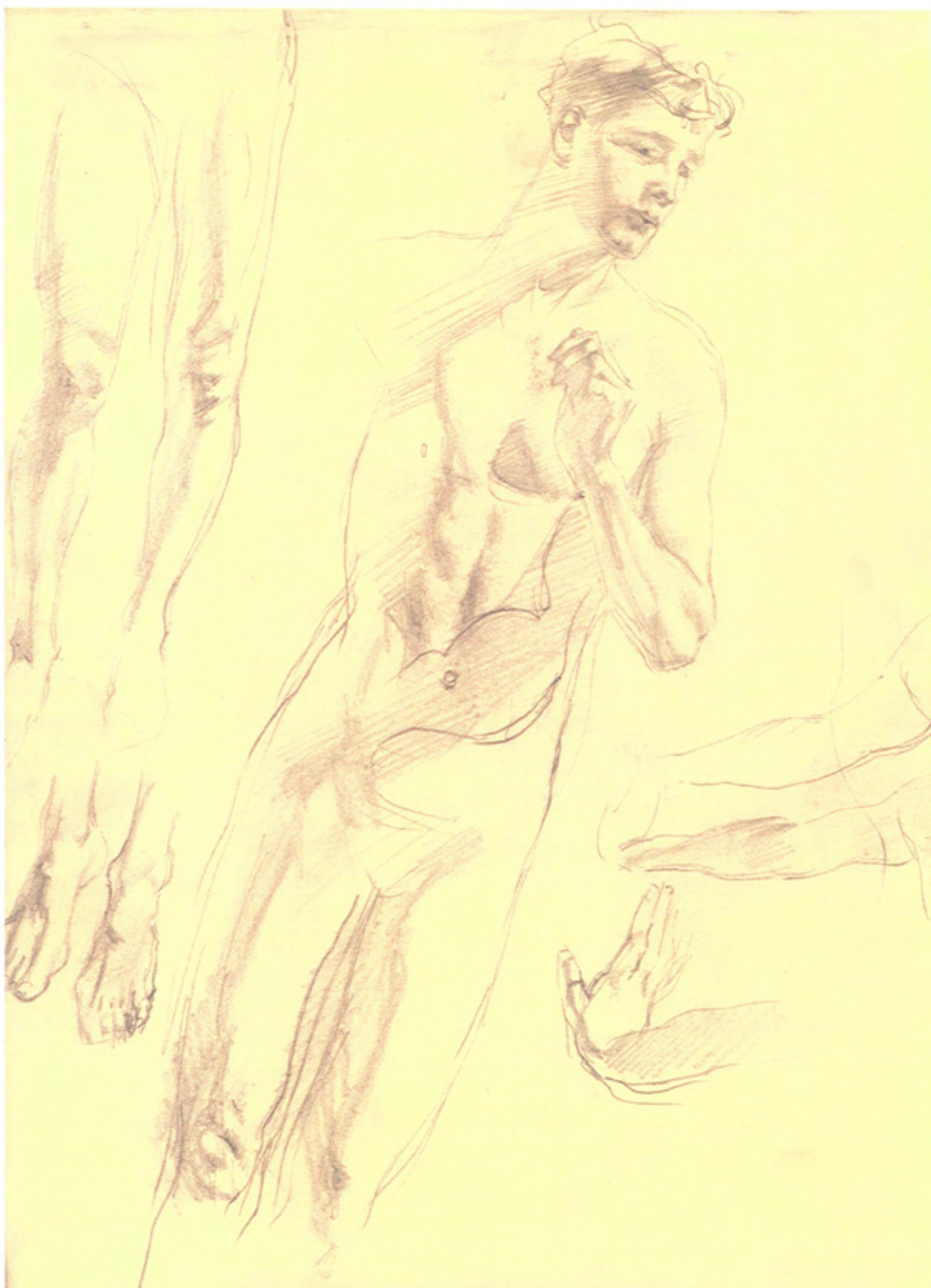


Fig.146 CS, Sketchpad page, study for *Spirituals*, c1926-7, graphite on paper, archive GB3025/4/16p.5

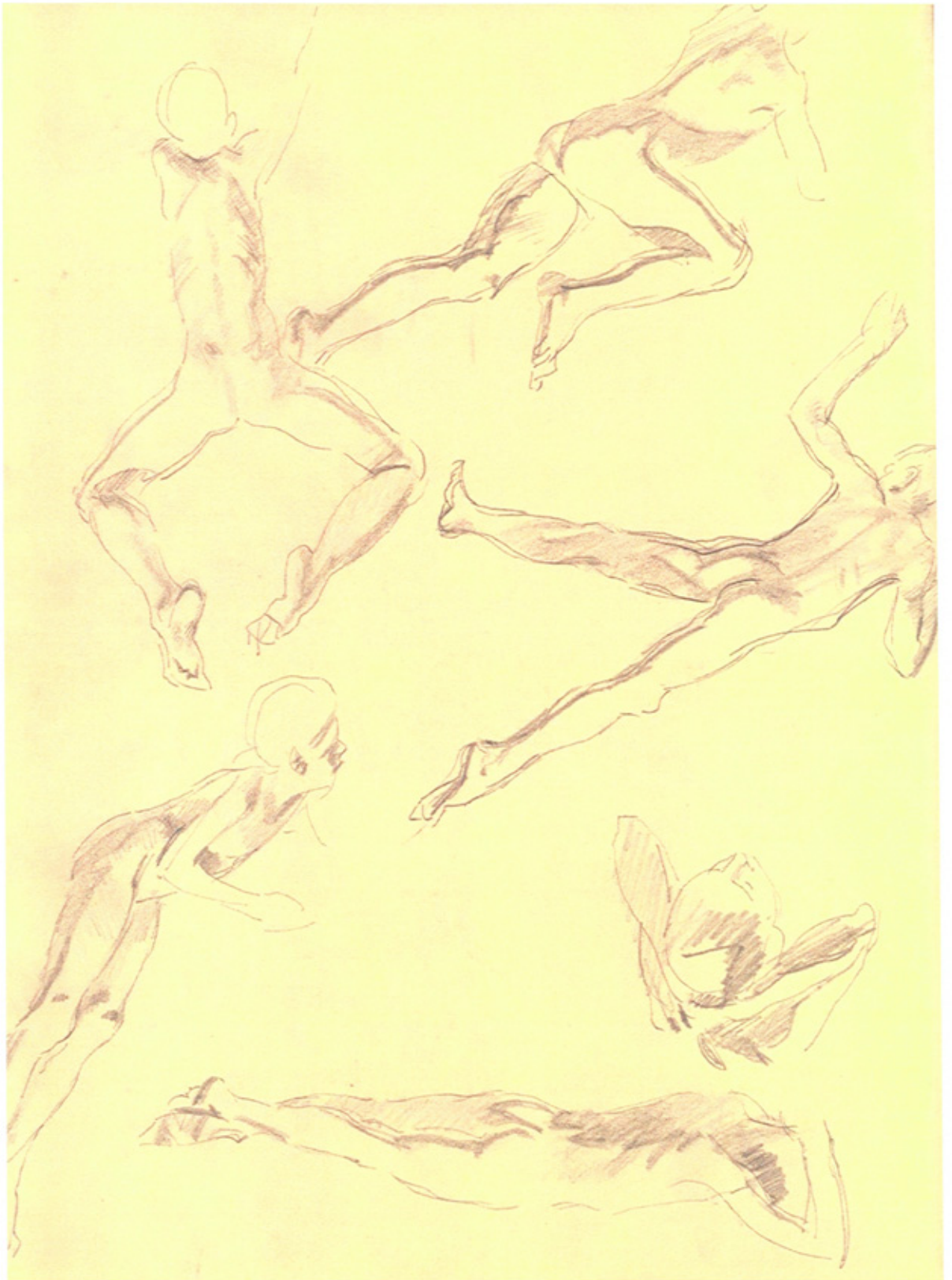


Fig.147 CS, Sketchpad page, study for *Spirituals*, c1926-7, graphite on paper, archive GB3025/4/16p.6



Fig.148 CS, *Behold I have Graven Thee on the Palm of My Hand*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.149 CS, *Here Am I*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

As with his *Seven Sacraments*, Sims adapted key elements of a particular idiom. We have already seen how his reaction to the mechanization and dehumanization of modern warfare, as explored by artists such as Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis, was to retreat to the imagery of the *quattro-cento*. With the *Spirituals* Sims adopted the slashes and tears, the striking palette and gestural marks of Expressionism – the violence and intensity – but ignored the impulse to use this set of aesthetic considerations in the depiction of physically mutilated humanity. The inhabitants of his earlier Arcadias were always physically perfect, and now, the figure as representative of the soul would be similarly unfettered by the imperfect body. In the context of post-war London, when the evidence of physical mutilation could be found in the veterans selling flags on every street corner, his representation of the soul as a pure perfected body overcoming corporeal trappings is striking.

The figures, idealized, smooth and generally pre-pubescent, as, for example in *Here Am I*, [fig.149] their contours delineated by the areas of saturated colour surrounding them and with minimal internal modelling; have a transparency and transience. 1920s reviews of El Greco admired his ‘flame-like treatment of bodies’ – seen to express energy, and Sims had acknowledged similar concerns as early as 1908 with his description of art as a ‘principle of vitality.’²⁶ He now described the figures in his *Spirituals* as ‘vivid spark like things.’²⁷ The numinous quality of much of his previous work, the implied presence of the supernatural or divine, is present here in the figures’ impalpability – through suggestion rather than statement. Sims’ figures are thrown into relief by the areas of darkness around them and are reminiscent of the effects of standing in front of a screen with a projection passing across the body, ‘as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen,’ particularly in *I Am the Abyss and I Am Light*, [fig.150].²⁸ It is

possible that this appearance was influenced by the demonstration of Thomas Wilfred's *Lumia*, which Sims may have seen whilst at the 1925 Paris Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Design.²⁹



Fig.150 CS, *I Am the Abyss and I Am Light*, 1927, tempera on canvas, Tate Britain

Wilfred, an American inventor, had developed a machine that, through light projections controlled from a console like a piano keyboard, produced what he called 'Colour Music' [figs.151-2]. The correlation between music and colour had of course been investigated by influential painters such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, indeed the conception and development of abstraction in the visual arts owed much to theories on this subject.³⁰ Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* had been reviewed by

Edward Wadsworth in the first issue of *Blast*, in 1914, and his discussions of an ‘inner necessity’ were common currency by the 1920s, experiments with the emotional effects of colour and correlations of art and music were hugely influential.³¹ Experiments in musical performances accompanied by light shows had started in the 1890s, and the American dancer, Loie Fuller, had performed her influential Serpentine Dance with the aid of coloured light projections [figs.153-4].³² The swirling fabric of Fuller’s costume directly influenced the sinuous curves and stylised route towards the anti-naturalism of *fin-de-siecle* Art Nouveau design. The effects of light and colour on theatre and particularly dance performance encouraged an abstraction of form. For a recent commentator, Fuller’s performances, as a butterfly or a burning woman:

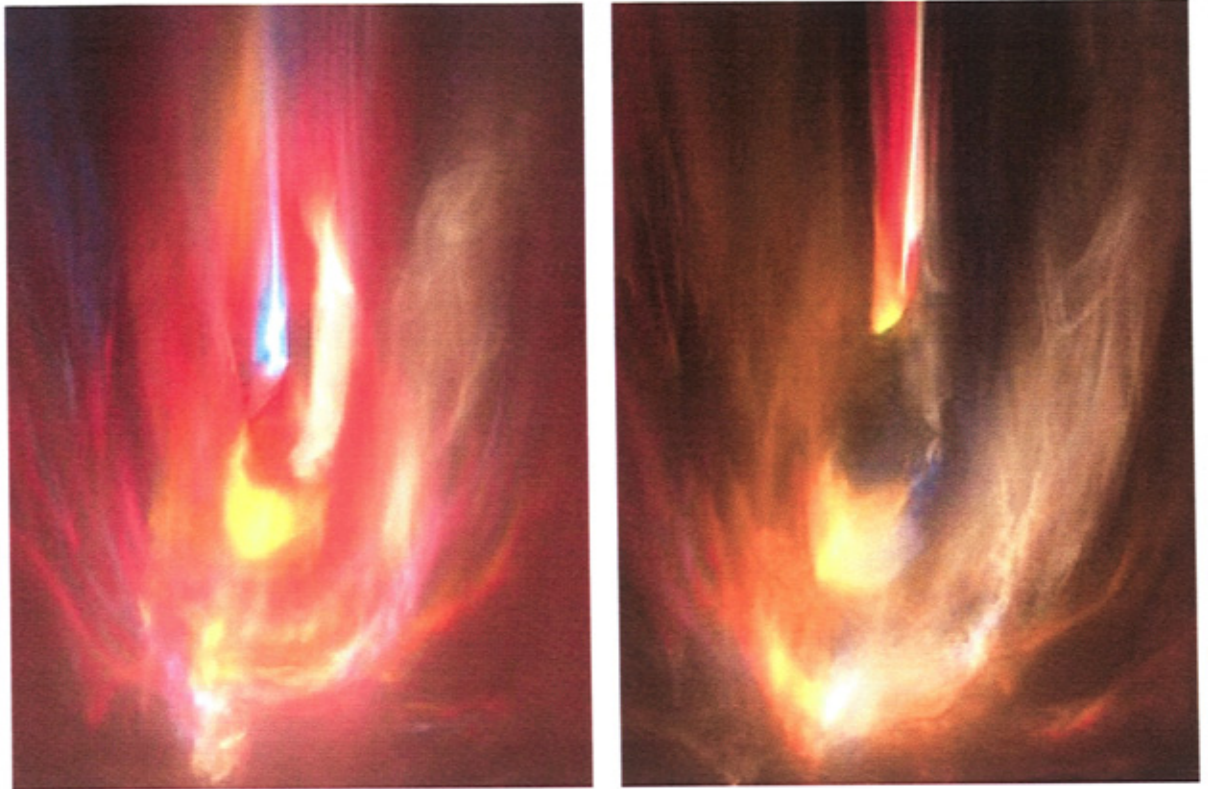
Offer[ed] a formula of ballet in which the body, camouflaged in an enveloping surface, was abstracted, and in which a changing and variously illuminated form appeared like pure organic movement, like the dynamics of fire or coloured turbulence, with neither representative nor narrative interest.³³

Sims’ emphasis on ‘distortion, cloudings and emphas[es],’ and ‘color [*sic*] to reveal (or conceal) form,’ suggest perhaps an awareness of this type of imagery, and Fuller and her troupe had performed widely in London and Paris by the 1920s.³⁴ Wilfred’s *Lumia* was the first case where the *light itself* was perceived to be the musical element – it did not rely on an aural accompaniment. *Lumia* has also been described as resembling the images of auras and thought forms interpreted by Spiritualist medium Annie Besant, and so was linked to the spiritual or supernatural.³⁵

The attack and decay of colors [*sic*] as they fade in and out, the metamorphoses of brilliant reds into rich wines and saturated purples that dissolve into luminous white, the intense gold of a sunset refusing to blend with a simultaneous apparition of a green or peach streak, the subtle directional flows with slight curling or bending just as they leave the screen, the interaction between nearly palpable veils and clouds of turbulence boiling up...³⁶

This portrayal could equally well apply to the amorphous dreamscape of *Here Am I*. Interest in forms of Spiritualism such as Helena Blavatsky’s Theosophy and Steiner’s

Anthroposophy was at its height in Britain during this period, with conversion away from the established Christian God who had, it was felt, allowed for the atrocities of war.³⁷ Spiritualist mediums offered comfort to those bereaved by the war – including Agnes Sims who, as mentioned, regularly attended séance gatherings.³⁸



Figs.151-2 Examples of Thomas Wilfred's *Lumia* c1925



Figs.153-4 Loie Fuller, *Serpentine Dance*, Postcards c.1903

For Sims this expressive abstract language, adopted for specific purposes like the others preceding it in his career, was the means to convey the internal, the introspective. Other European artists dealing with similar themes were known to be adherents to spiritualist theories. Czech painter František Kupka for example, was known as a medium and published his writings on the subject in relation to painting.³⁹ He believed that he could translate visionary or spiritual experiences into visual form. For Maurice Tuchman, Kupka's *The Dream*, 1906-09, [fig.155] which is strikingly similar to formal elements of Sims' *Spirituals*, depicted 'a transperceptual realm in which color [sic] is imaginary, space is infinite, and everything appears to be in a constant state of flux.'⁴⁰ The compositions of the *Spirituals*, particularly of two paintings in the series, echo this state of flux, the sense of impermanency, by the suggestion of continuing movement: in the first, *Here Am I*, the figure floats ethereally upwards, released from the Creator's hands an instant ago, whilst the balletic pose and tension of the bent legs in the second, *Behold I Have Graven Thee on the Palm of My Hand*, seem poised for further movement. Ballet, and dance in general, is one of the areas of visual culture that interested Sims and his contemporaries greatly. From before the Great War artists, musicians and theatre designers influenced each other.⁴¹ As an avid theatre-goer Sims was well aware of these alliances – and dance was a link between art and music. In some modernist circles dance had become a metaphor for authentic primordial human experience, the essence of life – a view partly influenced by the Ballets Russes, whose Paris and London seasons had become required viewing by 1914.⁴² Anne Estelle Rice's review of Diaghilev's *Schéhérazade* – which we know Sims saw on one of his regular visits to Ballet Russes performances – published in Fergusson's *Rhythm* in 1912, uses terms such as 'voluptuous... luxurious... undulating' describing the experience as visually and sensually powerful.⁴³ Sims' earlier lyrical pastoralism was naturally allied to the

bucolic sensuality of Matisse and Denis' dances, but in his *Spirituals* he was possibly becoming more receptive to the violence, the jagged edges and potential descent into the animalistic tendencies of Wyndham Lewis' interpretations. The reign of the Ballets Russes extended well into the post-war years when in early 1924 Diaghilev's *Les Biches* (The House-Party) was premiered in Monte Carlo. With music by Poulenc, choreography by Nijinska and set and costume designs by Marie Laurencin, [fig.156] this ballet became synonymous with 1920s hedonistic society. Laurencin's designs were, for *The Times*, as 'allusive and evocative' as her paintings with their '*jeune filles* ... enveloped in a pale cloud of pinks and greys.'⁴⁴

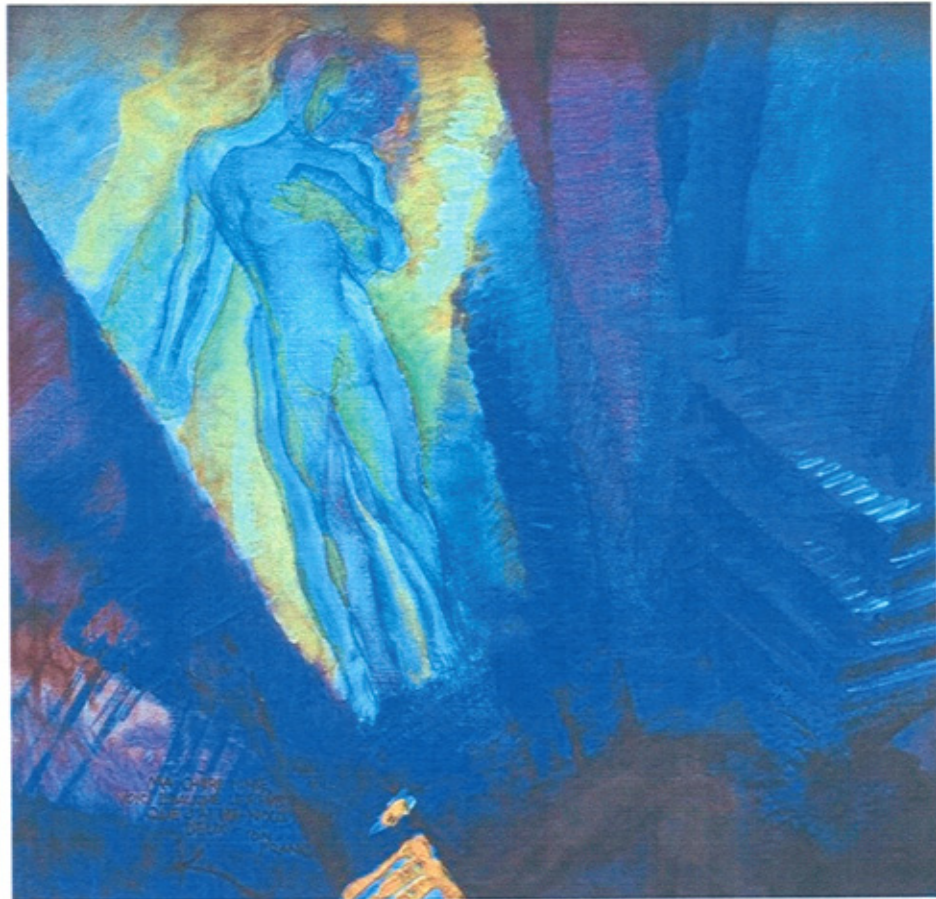


Fig.155 František Kupka, *The Dream*, 1906-9, oil on cardboard, Museum Bochum



Fig.156 Marie Laurencin, Design for *Les Biches*, c.1924, crayon on paper, untraced,

Sims rarely wrote in the first person, his instructions were universally didactic and not merely personal *aides memoires*. An exception was the extended monologue in which he discusses the transience of life, the possibility that invisible matter was more palpable than the visible:

I am only a piece of substance made visible, tangible, to human sight and touch. I may be thinner in substance than the invisible matter which finishes at my boundary, at my dissolution the matter changes.⁴⁵

These attempts to render visible the invisible, or to dissolve out of material existence into a spiritual world of salvation, relate to Kandinsky's 'inner necessity' and to the symbolist literary experiments of Poe and Maeterlinck. It is also possible that Sims was influenced, at least obliquely, by the examples of experimental cinema that he saw. Ysanne Holt has recently discussed the range of possible sources and influences on the *Spirituals*. She suggests that contemporary advances in the fields of psychoanalysis, spirit photography and theatre design, as well as the more obvious ones of

contemporary painting and printmaking, can all be understood to have some bearing on Sims' adoption of the specific visual language that he chose.⁴⁶ Holt concludes that the *Spirituals* represent Sims' attempts to depict an alternative to or escape from reality with 'notions of engaging some spiritual essence or inner subjective state.'⁴⁷ In this sense, the series clearly developed from his earlier insistent depictions of arcadias – in all cases the artist presented the viewer with an environment other than the literal and this implies a continuing yearning for states of innocence. This impulse, stemming from a retreat from modernity into fantasy, can only have been heightened by the experience of wartime and the consequent perception of a post-war 'world gone smash.'⁴⁸ Holt also suggests that Sims' experience of the quintessential modern city, New York, is visible in the jagged geometric beams of light, and shifts in perspective - from the claustrophobic to the seemingly limitless - of his backgrounds. His time in New York exposed Sims to an alien landscape, a city of emphasised verticals, of towering skyscrapers and extravagant illuminations.⁴⁹ Sadly, none of his notebooks from this period abroad survive but he sent his elderly father a postcard depicting the magnificent Woolworth Building inscribed 'From the top of this cottage' [fig.157].⁵⁰ There are no records detailing his movements whilst in America as Agnes did not accompany him and so her diary was concerned with her own appointments in England. It is tempting to suggest that he was influenced by the *Titan City: A Pictorial Prophecy of New York, 1926-2026* exhibition held in Wanamaker's Department Store, or that he watched Loie Fuller perform her *Serpentine Dance* to a packed house at the Metropolitan Opera House, however these are speculations.⁵¹ Holt makes the comparison between the *Spirituals* and Nevinson's *Soul of a Soulless City*.⁵² An even more striking association is perhaps with the work of American painter, Joseph Stella, in particular with *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted*, a series of monumental panels executed between

1920 and 1922.⁵³ Stella is particularly interesting in his decision to depict landmarks of the city - Brooklyn Bridge, skyscrapers [figs.158-9] - in the format more usually associated with religious imagery. His five panels are footed with a decorative predella of lamps and underground stations in the place where an altarpiece would display scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin. The religious connotations are reinforced by Stella's use of saturated colour reminiscent of stained glass. He claimed that, 'from arcs and ovals darts the stained glass fulgency of a cathedral.'⁵⁴ He explicitly correlates the modernity and technology of New York with religion, suggesting the modern as a replacement or surrogate focus of worship. This, of course, relates to Futurist ideals – Stella, Italian by birth, has been described as an American Futurist. In terms of Sims, the correlation of modern experience and religion is very interesting, this is part of what he aspired to in his *Spirituals*. Stella's writings provide an insight into his relationship with New York, and provide a startlingly close comparison to Sims' notes. For Stella, New York was, 'an immense kaleidoscope – everything is hyperbolic, cyclopic, fantastic... a prospect stretching out into the infinite... wide, geometric bands of shadow, moving like an invisible procession, mass, deepen, form and unform, float into view and disappear.'⁵⁵ There is no direct evidence that Sims knew of Stella's painting or writing, however Stella did exhibit in New York during 1925 and 1926-7 and it seems more than likely that Sims was at least aware of his work.⁵⁶ Stella's paintings from the mid-twenties relate to developments in Italian art during that period, specifically artists such as Severini, who had left their pre-war Futuristic concerns behind and responded to the wider impulse towards a re-acquaintance with traditional principles.



Fig.157 Postcard of Woolworth Building, New York (recto)



Postcard of Woolworth Building, New York (verso)
Charles Sims to his father, Stephen



Fig.158 Joseph Stella, *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted (Brooklyn Bridge)*, 1920-22, oil and tempera on canvas, The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ



Fig.159 Joseph Stella, *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted (Skyscrapers)*, 1920-22, oil and tempera on canvas, The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ

As in Sims' *Seven Sacraments*, for Barbara Haskell, their goal 'was not to copy the past, but to assimilate it to the present – to marry the artistic traditions of the Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance to the plastic concerns of contemporary art and thereby to engender a sense of continuity between past and present.'⁵⁷ This co-opting of past tradition to modern concerns in attempting to portray the universal, is precisely that to which Sims aspired. In preliminary sketches [fig.160], he explored the vision of a soul leaving its corporeal body behind. America, and especially New York in the 1920s, was an environment of hope, of upward movement, like the yearning and stretching of *Here Am I*, 'the soaring Whitmanesque optimism of the vertical, reaching forms, above;' for William James of 'courage and heaven-scaling audacity.'⁵⁸

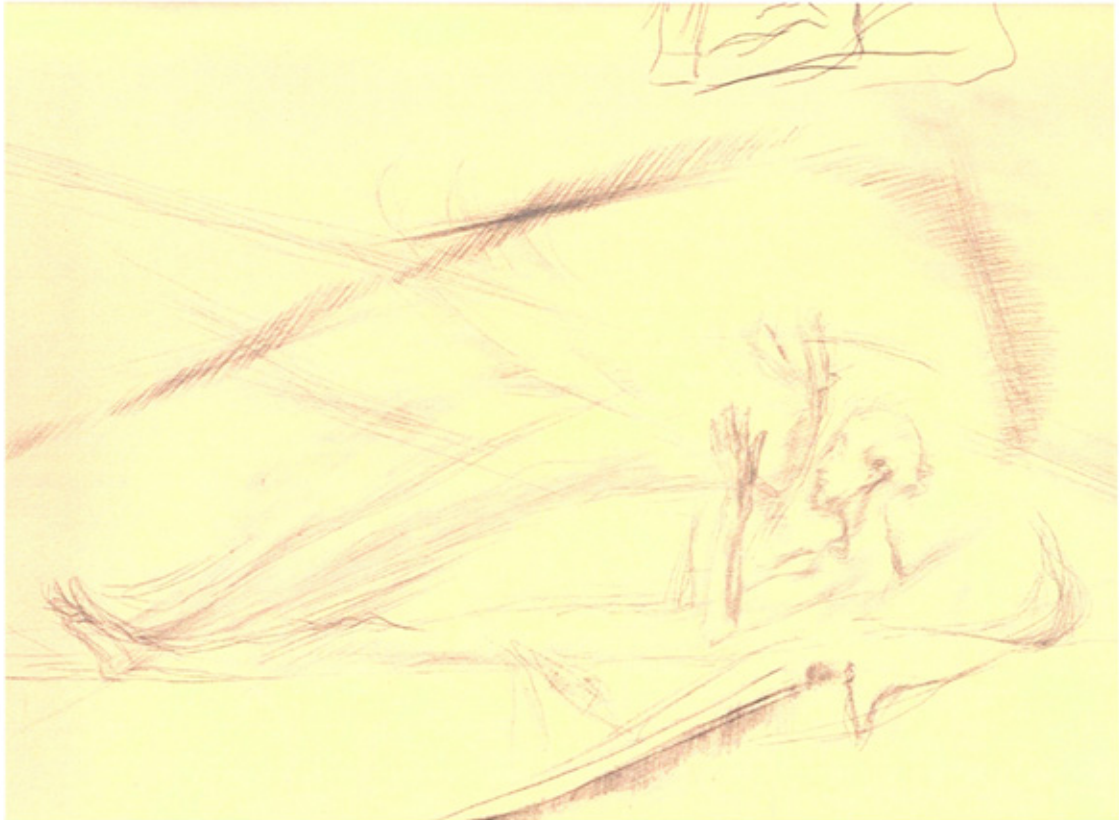


Fig.160 CS, Sketchpad page, study for *Spirituals*, c1926-7, archive GB3025/4/16

When the *Spirituals* were reassessed on their exhibition in 1932, *The Times* saw the series as a starting point which showed ‘what he might have done if he had lived to find the right form for his message,’ acknowledging that this ‘hectic plunge in the directions of El Greco and Blake’ should not be interpreted as the artist’s swansong.⁵⁹ We know from a letter from Katharine Younger to the Academy, setting forth the mitigating circumstances of Sims’ death, that he had intended a further ‘great picture... *The Riddle of Pain*.’⁶⁰ *The Daily Mail* published excerpts from a letter that Sims’ friend and patron, Percy Lumley-Ellis, had sent them. He quoted a conversation with Sims in which the artist had commented that it would ‘probably be some years before he achieved what he was aiming at,’ which do not appear to be the words of a man planning a *coup de grace*, but the arrangements of his death suggest otherwise.⁶¹

The circumstances surrounding Charles Sims' suicide have never been fully unravelled. He was found in the shallows of the River Tweed, not far from the Leaderfoot Viaduct from which he had apparently jumped after filling his pockets with stones from the railway line. This took place on Friday 13th of April 1928, a week or so after the *Spirituals* had been delivered to the Academy and a mere three weeks before the opening of the Summer Exhibition. Unless we accept that Sims deliberately lit the fuse and ran, as it were, it is difficult to understand why he would have avoided the inevitably high-profile reaction to a body of work that he saw as so significant. The innate irreverence and mischievousness of his younger days had obviously been tempered by the passing of years and experiences of war, however to kill oneself in such a dramatic fashion (instead, for example, by an overdose of the sleeping pills that we know he was prescribed) and on a day traditionally associated with disaster, is redolent of showmanship - a grand statement. According to newspaper obituaries he is said to have left two letters, one addressed to his wife Agnes and the other to his hostess, Katharine Younger.⁶² These have not survived, although correspondence between Sims and Mrs. Younger from the preceding weeks clearly indicates that he was depressed and distraught. Sims returned from the Côte d'Azur to the Younger household in late March 1928 (having spent a prolonged spell there the previous year) and it was whilst there at Ravenswood that he took his own life. In his last letters from San Remo he wrote of his 'acute mental distress,' and that 'something has happened far away, something that I need have no shame in telling you one day.'⁶³ This, although hitherto uninterpreted, must refer to the fact that Vivienne Jeudwine had remarried, and the event had recently been reported in *The Times*.⁶⁴ It would seem that this further betrayal was the final straw for a lonely man estranged from his wife and family, reliant on the good will of friends to provide lodgings, besieged by insomnia and exhausted by the intense emotional

concentration demanded by his paintings. We know, furthermore, that Sims was a man increasingly frightened of growing old – preliminary drawings for the *Spirituals* betray a preoccupation with the themes of Youth and Age which do not appear in the finished exhibited paintings. In July 1927 whilst working on the *Spirituals* at Percy Lumley-Ellis' home, Littlefield Manor, in Surrey, Sims wrote to Katharine Younger of 'adding up' his benefits which included 'a blooming garden, laden apple trees, good food' and, most significantly a 'task that angels might work at for eternity and not get tired.'⁶⁵ By February 1928 though, this positive outlook seemed to have deserted him. His elderly father had recently recovered from illness and was very weak, Sims wrote of wishing that 'he'd passed peacefully away on the top of a cheerful time,' and that watching the old man's pain had reinforced his own 'distrust of old age.' He was 'willing to believe that the gods are right and have a use for the trial of old age' but his 'humanity revolts, is impotent to explain, even to feel reconciled.'⁶⁶ The unblemished figures in the *Spirituals* moved, like their creator, beyond earthly concerns such as ageing and frailty, towards more fundamental human aspirations of freedom and salvation. He had written to Katharine Younger, a month or so before his death, that to die elderly and incapable was an intolerable prospect, for 'an exit then is just taking oneself off, begging to be forgotten and forgiven a nuisance, instead of a gallant bow and a bright memory to remain.'⁶⁷

¹ The room in which controversial paintings with potentially contagious modern tendencies were segregated. See Alan Sims, op. cit., p.129.

² Charles Sims' studio notebook.

³ The opening date was May 7th Sims' suicide was on April 13th. Living Royal Academicians were automatically entitled to exhibit a maximum of six paintings in the Academy exhibitions.

⁴ *Evening News*, undated review, and *Daily Mail* undated review, cuttings from Tate Gallery Archive.

⁵ Harold Speed, op. cit. p.64. The National Gallery had acquired El Greco's *Agony in the Garden* in 1920, described by *The Times* as a 'Modern Old Master' Jan 24th 1920 p.15. William Blake and the work of his followers underwent reassessment in the 1920s, at the V&A in 1926, and in his centenary year, 1927 at the Burlington Fine Arts Club.

⁶ Sims, op. cit., p.129.

⁷ *Daily Mail*, April 20th 1928, and *The Times*, April 19th 1928, p.16.

⁸ As cited in the *Daily Express*, unknown issue, press cutting from Tate Gallery Archive.

⁹ Frank Rutter, *Sunday Times*, unknown date (1928), cutting from Tate Gallery Archive.

¹⁰ Sims' late works are now sought by collectors of 'Outsider Art,' such as dealer Henry Boxer who specializes in art by members of marginalized groups. Sims is represented in the collection of the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum, a collection based on the premise that all of the artists suffered from mental illness.

¹¹ Chagall's paintings were well-known to the London audience by this time. In 1927 he had been included in the Leicester Galleries exhibition of modern French works. See the *Times* review, July 15th 1927, p.12. Kandinsky had exhibited in London since before the war, notably at the London Salon exhibitions in the Albert Hall.

¹² *The Times*, November 13th 1928, p.14.

¹³ 'Art Notes,' *Colour*, December 1928, p.26.

¹⁴ See David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, op. cit. p.203.

¹⁵ This may not be the case. As explored later, it is debatable whether or not Sims had further works planned or if he really did treat these six paintings as his last.

¹⁶ The artist's efforts to work from beyond the physical model relate closely to Rudolf Steiner's theories on the subject. For Steiner, the 'use of the model [was] only an intermediate stage in artistic development... the attempt had to be made to create out of a living spirituality, to overcome everything naturalistic.' 'Worte Rudolf Steiner's über die von ihm gestaltete plastische Gruppe' in *Aufbaugedanken und Gesinnungsbildung* (Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag am Goetheanum, Dornach 1942) as reproduced in Åke Fant, Arne Klingborg and A. John Wilkes, *Rudolf Steiner's Sculpture in Dornach*, introduction by Hagen Biesantz, translated by Erik Westerberg and A. John Wilkes, Rudolf Steiner Press, printed by The Garden City Press Ltd, Letchworth, 1975, p.60.

¹⁷ Charles Sims, sketchpad note, c.1927, in archive. All quotations from his notes hereafter refer to material in the archive unless otherwise stated.

¹⁸ Letter dated July 17th 1927. Ysanne Holt delivered a paper, *Charles Sims in the Isolation Ward of the Academy*, at the 2002 Annual Art Historians' conference. She also worked from the archive, and we refer to the same set of notes.

¹⁹ Laurencin had exhibited in London by this stage. Sims may also have seen her set and costume designs for Diaghilev's *Les Biches*, which premiered in Monte Carlo in early 1924 before opening in London.

²⁰ Sketchpad note, c.1927.

²¹ Ibid. More specifically, he referred to the 'gold Gauguin of the Tate' – presumably the frieze-like *Faa Iheihe*, 1898, acquired in 1919.

²² Ibid.

²³ David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, op. cit. p.207.

²⁴ He also referred frequently in his notes to the colours of Majolica pottery which saw a huge revival in interest and value during this period.

²⁵ David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, op. cit. p.208.

²⁶ Ana M. Berry, 'The Appreciation of Art Rhythm,' *The Studio*, Vol. XLVII, no. 432, March, 1929, pp.155-159, as cited in Ysanne Holt, unpublished paper, op. cit., p.8; and Sims, studio notebook, 1908.

²⁷ Charles Sims, sketchpad note, c.1927.

²⁸ T. S. Eliot, *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*, 1917.

²⁹ It is not certain that Sims attended the exhibition but it is unlikely that he missed the opportunity as he was in Paris at the time. Agnes Sims' diary, so helpful in pinpointing the family's movements previously, makes progressively fewer mentions of Charles after his relocation to Burlington House in 1920. From a researcher's point of view the significance of this lies in the sudden dearth of recorded social activity – Charles did not keep his own social diary and Agnes gave little detail of his whereabouts. We can speculate about exhibitions and concerts that he may have attended insofar as he was present in the right city at the right time, but during this period it is impossible to provide proof.

³⁰ An exhibition devoted to this phenomenon was recently held at the Thyssen-Bornemisza museum in Madrid. For interesting essays on the subject see the exhibition catalogue, *Analogías Musicales: Kandinsky y sus Contemporáneos* editor, Javier Arnaldo, Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2003.

³¹ First published in 1911. *Blast*, No.1, June 20th 1914, London: John Lane, Bodley Head, pp.119-125.

³² Professor Alexander Wallace Rimington, of Queen's College, London, first performed his experimental 'Colour Organ' on June the 6th 1895, at St. James's Hall, London. He accompanied a small orchestra in Wagner's *Rienzi Overture* by projecting light onto a screen – each note of the scale was represented by a specific colour. See Thomas Wilfred, 'Light and the Artist,' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. V, No. 4, June 1947, pp.247-255.

³³ Javier Arnaldo, *Analogías Musicales*, op. cit. p.384.

³⁴ Charles Sims, sketchpad note, c.1927.

³⁵ See William Moritz, 'Abstract Film and Colour Music,' in Arnaldo, ed. op. cit. pp.297-311.

³⁶ Ibid. p.298.

³⁷ Conversion to Spiritualism saw a sharp increase in the post-war years and early twenties, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for example signed up in 1917 and published his *New Revelation* in March 1918. This was immediately before his backing of the highly publicised Cottingley Fairies episode. For a discussion of the role of Spiritualism see G. K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

³⁸ Agnes Sims had been attending séance meetings since 1916, shortly after John's death. She was often accompanied by her friend, Harold Speed's wife, Clare. See Agnes Sims' diary November 2nd (and 14th and 15th) 1916.

³⁹ Kupka's artistic credo was first published in 1913 in *Meister der Farbe*, Vol V, Leipzig, pp.49-52. His *Creation in the Plastic Arts* was then published in Prague in 1923.

⁴⁰ Maurice Tuchman and Judi Freeman eds. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. Los Angeles, County Museum of Art and New York, Abbeville Press, 1986, p.35.

⁴¹ For an extended discussion of this phenomenon see Arnaldo, op. cit.

⁴² The Ballets Russes was a revolutionary cultural force in the early twentieth century, not only in terms of overhauling choreography – for the first time the ballerinas formed three dimensional ranks utilizing the depth of the stage, unlike the previously two dimensional row along the front in the manner of a tableau vivant – but also in that Diaghilev's policy was to employ visual artists instead of professional set and costume designers. Leon Bakst and Alexander Benois were Diaghilev's most regular designers and as artists they are both most identified with their collaboration with his choreographers and dancers, however artists known more for their painting such as Derain, Picasso and Ernst were also involved.

⁴³ Agnes Sims' diary, July 18th 1913. Anne Estelle Rice, 'Les Ballets Russes,' in *Rhythm*, Vol.2, No.7, August 1912, pp.106-110 as cited in Tickner, op. cit. p.106.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, June 3rd 1924, p.12.

⁴⁵ Notebook, c1927.

⁴⁶ Ysanne Holt, op.cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.1.

⁴⁸ John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties, Writing, Politics and Culture*, Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997, p177. As cited in Holt, ibid. p.3.

⁴⁹ In particular the amusement park on Coney Island, Luna Park which opened in 1903 with its 250,000 coloured lights. The Empire State Building was also in the process of being built during Sims' time in New York.

⁵⁰ Postcard, undated c.1925-26, SSS.

⁵¹ October 1925. This showed the work of architects Hugh Ferriss, Harvey Wiley Corbett and Raymond Hood – all latterly famous for their designs for modernist tower blocks. October 24th 1926 – this coincides with Sims' second trip to the United States.

⁵² Also produced in the late 20s.

⁵³ The five panels all measure more than 7ft high.

⁵⁴ Joseph Stella, 'Discovery,' as cited in Irma B. Jaffe, *Joseph Stella*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970, Appendix I, no. 17, and translated from the original Italian by Jaffe on p.70.

⁵⁵ Joseph Stella, 'New York,' as cited in Jaffe, ibid. Appendix I, no. 16, pp.77-78.

⁵⁶ Stella had a solo exhibition at the Dudensing Galleries in 1925, and showed as part of the *International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme*, at the Brooklyn Museum, November 19th 1926 – January 1st 1927.

⁵⁷ Barbara Haskell, *Joseph Stella*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Exhibition catalogue, April – October 1994. pp.139-40.

⁵⁸ Irma Jaffe, op. cit. p.70. As quoted in *The American Muse* Exhibition Catalogue, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, published in cooperation with *Art in America*, 1959, p.27. As cited in Jaffe, op. cit. p.77.

⁵⁹ The *Spirituals* were exhibited in the Royal Academy Winter Exhibition of works by late members, 1932-3. Sims was allocated three rooms of the show as if in belated recognition of his efforts – no 'Isolation Ward' this time. *The Times*, January 7th 1933, p.9, and *The Times*, June 24th 1932, p.10.

⁶⁰ Letter from Katharine Younger to Sir Frank Dicksee, communicated by Viscount Younger of Leckie, dated April 20th 1928.

⁶¹ *Daily Mail*, April 28th 1928, page number unknown, cutting from Tate Gallery Archive.

⁶² *Evening News*, April 17th 1928, page number unknown, cutting from Tate Gallery Archive.

⁶³ Letter from Charles Sims to Katharine Younger, handwritten date of 10.3.28(?) from La Dragonniere, Cap Martin. Sims writes of a Mrs. Pringle who was recuperating on the Riviera, it seems that she was an acquaintance of both Sims and Mrs. Younger and that he felt duty bound to keep her company.

⁶⁴ The wedding was on March 3rd 1928, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as reported in *The Times* on March 9th p.1.

⁶⁵ Letter from CS to Katharine Younger, July 17th 1927, transcription in archive.

⁶⁶ Letter from CS to Katharine Younger, February 16th 1928, transcription in archive.

⁶⁷ Letter from CS to Katharine Younger, February 16th 1928, transcription in archive.

Conclusion: A Bright Memory to Remain?

The last time a major body of Sims' work was exhibited was in the early 1930s when he was represented in winter 1932-33 at the Royal Academy Commemorative exhibition at Burlington House. Works by 14 late members and associates were selected for exhibition, amongst them Orpen, La Thangue, Ricketts, Tuke, and Sims' old adversary from his Keepership days, Frank Dicksee. Each artist was allotted a room, except for Orpen, whose 'fertility and the popular interest in his work,' allowed him three, and Sims, whose 'later works' overflowed into the Architectural room as they 'would not fit into the general scheme of hanging.'¹ Sims and Orpen were further linked by the *Times* preview as 'each in his different way,' responding to 'the modern spirit.'² Described in the same preview as a 'turn-the-century' [*sic*] exhibition, this was popularly regarded as an exemplification of British painting of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³ By the time the exhibition opened the press were describing the works on offer as 'Types of the Time,' that were 'consistently and without effort national.'⁴ However the reputation of Sims and his contemporaries - fellow Edwardian Academicians and Associates - was already being overtaken by younger British artists with more radical ambitions, such as Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. In the early 1930s the Royal Academy stood for 'all that was old and stuffy,' and artists of Sims' generation 'seemed inextricably linked with a world that everyone was trying to forget.'⁵ Since this 30s exhibition Sims and many of his contemporaries have been largely ignored by art historians.

One of these artists who *has* been publicly reassessed is Orpen, both in Bruce Arnold's 1981 biography, *Orpen: Mirror to an Age*, and more recently in January 2005 when a

major retrospective opened at London's Imperial War Museum - *William Orpen: Politics, Sex and Death*.⁶ The latter prompted a plethora of reviews, most of which commented on the artist's success in his lifetime and rapid decline into obscurity following his death in 1931. The exhibition therefore was a 'triumph of rediscovery and reinterpretation.'⁷ One reviewer admitted that before the opening she thought of Orpen as 'little more than a second-rate Lavery – which is to say, a fourth-rate John Singer Sargent,' an assumption that she later realised was 'culpably unfair on all sorts of levels.'⁸ Sims was, at certain points in his lifetime, reviewed as favourably as all three of these artists – indeed, with his *Countess of Rocksavage* he was popularly regarded to have overtaken even Sargent – since then he has been forgotten. The same review asks 'what should be done with those artists like Orpen or Sir William Nicholson [or indeed Sims] who seem to represent a figurative tradition that while impeccably modern, still doesn't fit neatly within any of our off-the-shelf narratives of modernity?'⁹ Perhaps the time is now right to reassess these forgotten Edwardian painters - this thesis could contribute towards a broader project of this type, which might investigate Sims' contemporaries such as Harold Speed, successful during their lifetimes but largely forgotten since.

Although it concentrated on the IWM's vast holdings of Orpen's war-time paintings, the 2005 exhibition sought to display the range of his output across his entire career – from student works such as *The Play Scene from Hamlet*, 1899, to late paintings like *The Fair at Neuilly*, and *Sunlight*, both 1925.¹⁰ An exhibition like this concentrating on Sims – from *The Vine* and *Childhood* to the *Spirituals* - is long overdue. Discovery of the archive has allowed a uniquely detailed survey of his life and work, culminating in a study which demonstrates Sims' significance as more representative of his time than

previously thought. His career spans a fascinating and still relatively neglected period of British art history and Sims' personal reactions, recorded in the archive in various forms, have allowed a kaleidoscopic view of his surroundings – his work charts a trajectory through the diverse preoccupations and opportunities of early 20th century Britain.

As we have seen, Sims was not affiliated to any particular artistic movement during his lifetime, a sense recognised by the *Star* in a review of his successful 1906 exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, where, the writer observed, he had the audacity and skill to 'hunt with the Academy and run with the Independents,' but even if his paintings do not fit easily into any movement, modernist or otherwise, they should still be viewed as representative examples of the period, not as eccentric anomalies best forgotten about.¹¹ It has become clear that Sims' over-riding impulse was to achieve continuity between past art, ancient religions and modern living in pursuit of an idyll, as recognised by cultural historian Ernest Short in his survey of British painting in 1953, and for whom Sims created a 'world where faith and present experience are one.'¹² He adapted contemporary techniques such as impressionist *plein airisme* in the depiction of ancient mythological subjects, modern expressionist flashes and tears of colour for suggesting Blakean wanderings of the soul, and a *quattrocento* simplification of form when reacting to the modern horrors of the Great War. The lack of reliance on any single style makes both the artist and his paintings very difficult to classify and far easier, historically, to ignore. This thesis is not the 'life and works' of a naturalist, an impressionist or a symbolist painter, but simultaneously all of these. This is where the major interest lies – the study has revealed a figure who represents a transitional moment in British art history, and who articulated the problems surrounding him in

interesting ways. Sims' attempts to work through his own personal preoccupations concisely illustrate the more widespread dysphoria of the time, especially in the post-war period.

In the years immediately following his death Sims was remembered 'chiefly as an inventor of fanciful "poesies" ... and as an accomplished craftsman in paint.'¹³ His book was published posthumously in 1934 as part of the Seeley Service and Co. *New Art Library*; but even here, despite Alan Sims' best efforts to the contrary, his major contribution was seen to be that of a skilful technician or instructor, not as a significant artist, as highlighted by the title, *Picture Making, Technique and Inspiration*.¹⁴ Sims was included in several 20s and 30s surveys of British painting such as the 1929 *All Sorts of People*, by Gladys Storey (daughter of G. A. Storey RA).¹⁵ She described him, rather romantically, as a 'wayward genius,' whose art 'stirred and held the imagination,' and reproduced a sketch for the 1911 painting *Love in the Wilderness* that Sims had given her and entitled – with characteristic humour – *Pome*.¹⁶ Storey's criteria for inclusion in her book seems to have been those artists who had donated sketches to her 'album' or whom, at the very least, she had met. A more significant mention of Sims, by an influential critic whose opinion counted for rather more, appeared in Frank Rutter's *Art in My Time*, 1933.¹⁷ Rutter described Sims' St. Stephen's Hall panel as exhibiting a 'clearly expressed sympathy with modern aims, by the fine swirl and animation of its design, its simplification of forms, its controlled but clear-ringing colour,' and felt that his *Spirituals* indicated 'how still more successful Sims, had he lived, might have been.'¹⁸ Rutter, whose main preoccupation during the 20s and 30s was with the principles of design underpinning modern painting, had already mentioned Sims in his chapter 'The Art of Today' in *The Outline of Art*, edited with Orpen, where

he described the popular *Countess of Rocksavage*, as ‘exquisitely gracious and accomplished.’ This was first published in 1926 – two years before Sims’ *Spirituals* were exhibited, when the portrait was still probably his most famous painting.¹⁹ On the other hand William Rothenstein’s memoir *Men and Memories*, 1932, omits him altogether (although oddly, he mentions friends that they had in common and events we know that Sims attended) and the later volume, *Since Fifty*, 1939, mentions him only briefly, as one of the St. Stephen’s Hall artists and as Keeper of the Academy Schools coinciding with Rothenstein’s leadership at the Royal College.²⁰

Kenneth Clark, whom Sims painted as a boy in 1911, reminisced about their friendship during the 20s in his autobiography, *Another Part of the Wood*.²¹ He described Sims as ‘technically a gifted artist’ and an ‘intelligent man,’ but ‘alas, he had no real centre,’ thus reinforcing the sense that his habit of experimentation was a downfall.²² Clark also remembered, however, that Sims was the first person to mention Cézanne to him, remarking that he should ‘like to stop painting for a year and then begin again as the humblest pupil of Cézanne. But it’s too late.’²³ Clark found these ‘strange words to hear from the man who had just painted the “Picture of the Year,” his portrait of Lady Rocksavage,’ dating the conversation to late 1922. The remark not only proves Sims’ interest in early French modernism but also reveals his increasing dissatisfaction with the Academic hierarchy he was by then a part of.²⁴ Sims also let Clark paint a section of his *Studio of a Painter of Fêtes Galantes*, the younger man having found him ‘confronting, without much appetite, an enormous and rather stupid canvas depicting an eighteenth-century painter in his studio,’ an episode which was perhaps another indication of Sims’ growing disenchantment with the artistic establishment.²⁵ Clark expressed sorrow but little surprise at Sims’ suicide, seeing his *Spirituals* as

unsuccessful 'eleventh hour repentances,' and felt that 'Sims had not found his true self because by that time there was no true self to find.'²⁶

The eclecticism that characterised much of Sims' career and earned him praise during his lifetime, does not sit comfortably in later modernist accounts in which successful artistic development was judged in terms of some process of continual linear advancement. The career of Sims' slightly older contemporary, Philip Wilson Steer, had also been notable for its experimentation – Steer consistently explored a variety of techniques in his search for 'congruous beauty.' The *Times* review of Steer's acclaimed 1909 Goupil Gallery exhibition proffered a range of past artists to which certain of his paintings compared, including Rembrandt, Claude, Crome, Daubigny and Constable.²⁷ At the time, this scope was wholly admired but, by 1944 in Douglas Cooper's controversial article, *The Problem of Wilson Steer*, that eclecticism was cited as evidence of his amateurish and parochial Englishness.²⁸ For Cooper, outspoken Anglophobe and champion of early European modernism, who amassed a vast collection of Cubist paintings throughout the 30s and 40s, there was no evidence of a 'Steer idiom or formula,' the artist relied on pastiche rather than having anything of his own to say.²⁹ He saw Steer as 'a temperamental spirit flitting from bloom to bloom, not to gain strength but to take refuge, for safety.'³⁰ Cooper's critique contrasts strikingly with the *Evening News*, in 1906, which had described Charles Sims admiringly as a 'butterfly or a bright bird ever on the flit, transferring his... deft... clever... impressions to canvas.'³¹ The evidence of national character celebrated by that *Times* preview of the 1932-3 Academy exhibition, was, by the 1940s, seen by Cooper as an 'art of moods and primary sensations... the best the British painter can achieve.'³² He suggested that the British excelled only in literature, and 'as painters they are unoriginal, uninspired and

unsatisfying.³³ Slightly later, in the 1950s, Ernest Short suggested (perhaps unfashionably) that as ‘emphatically a painter and not a poet,’ one would not ‘willingly omit from the story of British painting the mystical canvasses Charles Sims produced in his later years,’ for his purpose was to ‘set down spiritual ideas in painterly terms.’³⁴ John Rothenstein (William Rothenstein’s son, Orpen’s nephew and then Director of the Tate) also ignored Sims completely, omitting him from his 1952 *Modern English Painters: Volume 1 – Sickert to Grant*, and its 1956 sequel *Volume 2 – Innes to Moore*.³⁵ Rothenstein’s directorship at the Tate saw him adding modern British paintings by Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore and later, Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud to the collection. The only Sims purchased during his time there was *The Sands at Dymchurch*, c.1921, [fig.161] bought in 1942 from Judge Konstam (Vivienne Jeudwine’s father), a panoramic landscape comparable in some ways to the barren scene of his *Old German Frontline at Arras*, almost oppressive in its highly coloured vista, although here there was also an element of humour in the pile of abandoned clothing and the vermillion figure running beyond the right-hand edge of the painting.



Fig. 161 CS, *The Sands at Dymchurch*, c.1921, tempera and oil on canvas, Tate Britain

Sims continued to be passed over in, for example, Dennis Farr's 1978 *English Art 1870-1940*, Frances Spalding's 1986 *British Art Since 1900*, and Charles Harrison's 1981 *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*. In all of these attention was paid to artists identified with particular groups such as members of the Bloomsbury Group or the Vorticists, artists more significantly associated with the Slade than the Academy – possibly another contributory factor to Sims' neglect.³⁶ On those rare occasions when he is considered by more recent authors, particular periods of Sims' career are singled out or cherry-picked as if indicating his entire oeuvre, or else he has been used to illustrate a specific point. For example, Kenneth McConkey has described him as 'the painter who directly engaged with eighteenth century frivolity,' and David Peters Corbett as an example of the irreconcilable problems facing the academician wishing to engage with modernism – both of which are valid observations but which pay no heed to other aspects of his career.³⁷ For John Christian, Sims was 'the symbolist of frivolity, the master of sun-bathed forms and lost-and-found outlines' in the catalogue to the 1989 Barbican exhibition *The Last Romantics*, in which Sims was corralled with a range of artists as exemplifying the 'Early Academic Tradition.'³⁸ Four works were shown – *Then Comes in the Sweet o' the Year*, a watercolour sketch of *Spring Song* and *Syrid and Pattatos* – all examples of his immediately pre-war pastorals, and *Epilogue*, c.1922, another 'three graces' in a classical style. These choices emphasise a particular aspect of his career fitting to the context of the exhibition. As this survey of Sims' historiography has shown, the artist has been written in and out of history – at certain points an anomalous embarrassment, at others a prime example of British painting of the period – depending on the preoccupation of the author.

Sims' particular influence on other painters should also not be ignored. Chapter Five has considered how during his years as Keeper, and especially at the notorious 'Flapper Exhibition' – the Academy summer show of 1921 – works bearing witness to his own personal style and subject matter were common. Cuttings in the archive relate to his controversial decision that year to exhibit the paintings of six female students of the Academy Schools. These included Agnes Tatham whose *The Idol*, was clearly a 'Simsie' subject, but also the Zinkeisen sisters, Doris and Anna, both of whom were later successful portrait painters and muralists.³⁹ Doris Zinkeisen appears particularly influenced by Sims – as well as Orpen – in her theatrical subject matter, see *Les Sylphides*, c1938, and the technique of her 1929 self-portrait echoes many of Sims' 20s society portraits, especially in the rendering of the background drapery [fig.162]. Both sisters employed a semi-abstract style in the 1930s, reminiscent of Sims' *Spirituals*, see for example, Doris' *Wear and Tear* and Anna's *Monstrol Blue*, both c.1935.⁴⁰



Fig.162 Doris Zinkeisen, *Doris Clare Zinkeisen*, RA 1929, oil on canvas
National Portrait Gallery, London

On the announcement of his death *The Times* published a letter from the RA students expressing their ‘deep regret’ at Sims’ passing. Given that he had scarcely taught there for the last two years of his life, and that his absences caused considerable upheaval to the education received by these students (as Theo Cowdell has observed, many of them failed to perform as well as expected in their November 1926 examinations), their obvious sadness at his death is striking: ‘His sympathy and unusual insight into the mind of the student, his ... stimulating criticism, made him a master of surpassing value.’⁴¹ His legacy as a well-respected teacher was probably to be expected, more surprising and far more problematic to prove is his influence on contemporaries. This thesis has suggested that older artists such as Frank Bramley possibly also followed Sims’ example, especially with his 1910 *And Mocks my Loss of Liberty*, and Sims’ friend Harold Speed certainly shared his preoccupations, creating a series of mythical idylls throughout his career such as his 1910 *Apollo and Daphne* and *Twilight in Pan’s Garden* in 1929. Furthermore, obituaries of Sims’ father-in-law, John MacWhirter RA, suggested that his late watercolours of Genoa harbour were influenced by the younger man, one cited in particular his *Clear, Placid Leman*, in which the ‘airy figure’ was ‘strongly suggestive of Mr. Charles Sims.’⁴² Glyn Philpot’s 1930s paintings explored strikingly similar themes to the *Spirituals*, especially his *Ascending Angel*, 1931-2, [fig.163] a stylised figure set against a geometric background and his *Great Pan*, controversially rejected by the Academy in 1933.⁴³ Critics of the time certainly drew parallels between the two artists, for Konody in 1932, Philpot’s new work represented ‘as complete a volte-face... as the mystical compositions of the late Charles Sims.’⁴⁴



Fig. 163 Glyn Philpot, *Ascending Angel*, 1931-2, oil or tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown

These examples all suggest different aspects of Sims' work as potentially influential but it is vital to remember that, as this thesis has demonstrated, however disparate in stylistic terms the varying periods of his career may appear, his impetus was underpinned by one fundamental principle - artistic creation was the means through which to 'achieve freedom.' Whilst we accept existing reality without question we can never be free, he maintained – 'we are slaves while we live in what *is*.'⁴⁵ This continual yearning, not just to *find* an alternative to lived experience, but to *make* one, characterises Sims' career and prompted his exploration of key interlocking themes in pursuit of his idyll.

The first of these themes, introduced very early in his career with the conception of *Childhood*, is of lost innocence (or better times past) as represented by the child. Children appear throughout Sims' career in seemingly disparate canvasses from *The Kingdom of Heaven* to *The Wood Beyond the World*, *Playmates* to *Spring Song*.

Whatever the method or the primary subject matter, the child figure is present to hint at a symbolic subtext, sometimes overtly as in *The Kingdom of Heaven* and *Childhood*, sometimes more obliquely as in the Arran paintings. On some occasions children perform mythological roles - as *putti* or baby fauns - and represent ancient themes, on others they wear recognisably contemporary clothing and clearly refer to a specific present moment as in *Clio*. Sims' preoccupation with childhood innocence also related to his obsession with perfect healthy bodies – rosy-cheeked youngsters taking the role of ideal humanity, of pre-industrial civilization, of worlds inaccessible to cynical or battle-weary adults.

Another key characteristic of Sims' particular arcadia is the numinous landscape. He spent years painting the idyllic scenery of Sussex around his pre-War homes and peopling this discrete landscape with the manifestations of his imagination, nymphs and *putti*. During and after the War he returned to this landscape as if, through recording the rolling English countryside, to reinforce the world that had existed for him before. In *And the Fairies ran away with their clothes* a glade reminiscent of the early photograph in his scrapbook was crowded with supernatural creatures, in *Lodsworth from River* and *A Kentish Hop-Garden* more specific localised scenes were imbued with a reassuring timelessness.⁴⁶ The pagan frolics of Sims' pre-war *fêtes galantes* suggested the innocence of an 18th century pre-industrial paradise, but more than that, his nymphs and fauns alluded to more ancient cultures made visible, he suggests, by simple immersion in the rural idyll.

Once the artist began to be preoccupied with Christian imagery the role of the landscape altered from the hidden thicket where one might happen upon characters from myth and

legend, to a clearer, more intensely focussed space, where visions are made flesh. The Madonna and Three Graces that appeared in *The Wood Beyond the World*, were very different from the baby faun and living statues one might just catch a glimpse of if quiet and patient enough. These figures did not land on picnic tables or detach themselves from shadows. They were, Sims suggested, always there in the background of the imagination in a part of the mind not reserved for fancy or romance, but for simple faith. The landscape then became the setting for holy mysteries and the proof that religious experience is democratically omnipresent – like Spencer’s Cookham and Piero’s Arezzo, Sims’ humble Sussex witnessed sacred rites.

Having progressed from the landscape itself to the emotional and spiritual resonance that it conveyed, Sims then freed himself to ‘paint ideas.’⁴⁷ His explorations of spirituality began to take place in amorphous dreamscapes, seemingly far from rural Sussex, but yet another manifestation of the ‘garden of the mind’ he had long evoked. The swirls of colour and cloud-like formations of *My Pain Beneath Your Sheltering Hand* [fig.164] call to mind a physical location as securely as El Greco’s imaginative *View of Toledo*, c.1597, [fig.165]. Sims moved beyond the specifics of the landscape to the suggestion of a mindscape, pulsing against the boundaries of self-awareness and rejecting the inevitability of ageing and corporeal decay – the infirmity of the body which had always horrified him.



Fig.164 CS, *My Pain Beneath Your Sheltering Hand*, 1927, tempera on canvas, whereabouts unknown



Fig.165 El Greco, *View of Toledo*, c.1597, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of New York, www.lyons.co.uk/html/large/Toledo.htm (19.5.05)

This thesis has reinvestigated a painter marginalized since his dramatic death, but high-profile and popular during his lifetime. In 1908, for *The Globe*, Sims had seemed ‘destined indisputably to take a place among the ablest and most individual members of the British school,’ later, his *Countess of Rocksavage* was recognised as ‘a challenge to any school or any time’ as representing the ‘triumph of youth,’ but neither of these predictions or descriptions endured.⁴⁸ An exhibition visitor in the first decade of the 20th century would probably have heard of Charles Sims. This was even more likely after the publicity surrounding his election as ARA in 1908. By 1919 his ‘celebrity’ was such that he was invited to judge a *Daily Mail* beauty competition as a household name, and his death in 1928 was widely reported in the daily newspapers. Sims was regularly reviewed in the same columns as Augustus John, William Orpen and John Singer Sargent, all of whom have retained or reclaimed their reputations. The thesis does not suggest that Sims was the most significant British painter of his generation, but demonstrates that his preoccupations and innovations were not only securely of their time, but fully deserving of renewed examination. His subject pictures reflect a range of preoccupations common to several of his contemporaries, whilst arguably eccentric in its breadth, his oeuvre exhibits characteristics we might expect from a British painter of this period and compares more than favourably to the work of some of his better-known counter-parts. The ambition at the very beginning of this research was to investigate late Victorian and Edwardian representations of children and childhood. Sims’ *Childhood* was the first of his paintings to be considered and it obviously fulfilled the criteria set for study. There was little indication of how much more fascinating the project would become on further research into the artist and the range of his output, particularly after contact with John Sims and discovery of the archive. Sims has emerged as a complex, fascinating and, above all else, generous individual, his copious notes and diverse studio

contents allows for a remarkably detailed view of his life and milieu. It is to be hoped that this study has opened the way for similar surveys of Sims' forgotten contemporaries and that, as he wished, he may belatedly prove a 'bright memory to remain.'

¹ *The Times*, December 22nd 1932, p.10.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *The Times*, January 7th 1933, p.9.

⁵ Robert Upstone, 'Love and Beauty in an Age of Extremes,' in *William Orpen: Politics, Sex and Death*, Imperial War Museum, London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2005, p.47.

⁶ London: Jonathan Cape, 1981, and Imperial War Museum, London, January 27th – May 2nd 2005.

⁷ John Mackinlay, on the Royal United Services Institute website, www.rusi.org/publications/journal/ref:P4214BF2FD938C/ February 2005 (31.5.05). For Mackinlay, 'defamed by his surviving rivals and former friends, the energetic proliferation of new art movements helped to accelerate Orpen's disappearance.' Ibid. See also the IWM website, www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/46/orpen/introduction.htm and Kenneth McConkey, 'Killing Fields,' *The Guardian*, Saturday January 15th 2005, p.19.

⁸ Bunny Smedley, *William Orpen at the Imperial War Museum*, on the Social Affairs Unit website at www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000312.php (1.6.2005).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The scope shown illustrates the artist's eclecticism, but also, rather unfortunately, highlights the patchiness of his oeuvre – the masterful *Lady Rocksavage*, 1913, hung next to the disappointingly crude portrait of his wife, *A Woman in Grey*, 1908, the disparity between the two is startling and, one cannot help feeling, rather unkind on the part of the curator.

¹¹ *Star*, unknown date, 1906, (SSS).

¹² Ernest Short, *A History of British Painting*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953, p.205. Short (1875-1959) also wrote a variety of surveys of the theatre published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, and a volume about church architecture, *Post-War Church Building*, London: Hollis and Carter, 1947.

¹³ *The Times*, January 7th 1933, p.9.

¹⁴ Seeley Service's catalogue reveals its primary role as the publisher of instruction books for hobbyists, such as John Irving's 1938 *Yachtsman's Weekend Book*, or Douglas Ashby's *Things seen in Switzerland in Summer*, published in 1949. A 'Google' search (15.2.2005) using the terms 'Seeley Service and Co. publications' revealed a preponderance of this type of publication.

¹⁵ Gladys Storey, *All Sorts of People*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1929.

¹⁶ The sketch was accompanied by the 'pome' of the title, a snippet illustrating the artist's irrepressible humour:
'And if you ask of me this pome

The meaning for to show,
I don't exactly know-ow-ow
I don't exactly know.'

Ibid., p.205.

¹⁷ Frank Rutter, *Art in My Time*, London: Rich and Cowan Ltd., 1933.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.205.

¹⁹ Sir William Orpen, ed. *The Outline of Art*, London: George Newnes Ltd., p.670.

²⁰ William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories* was first published in 1932 by Faber and Faber. *Since Fifty*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd. 1939, pp.40 and 25 respectively. Rothenstein and Sims were both in France gathering information for official war paintings in December 1917. From the Orpen letters in the archive we know that Sims, Orpen and John spent time together in Cassels, Amiens and Arras. Rothenstein cites a letter from John to himself arranging meetings between the two of them and Orpen who was 'generally at Amiens.' It seems strange that the four artists didn't coincide at least once. See Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, op. cit., p.331.

²¹ Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood: A Self Portrait*, London: John Murray Ltd., 1974.

²² Ibid., p.50.

²³ Cited ibid., p.51.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.52.

²⁷ *The Times*, April 22nd 1909, p.13.

²⁸ Douglas Cooper, 'The Problem of Wilson Steer: A Study in British Painting,' *Burlington Magazine*, Vol.84-5, 1944, pp.66-71.

²⁹ According to his partner, John Richardson, Cooper's collection was a deliberate challenge to the conservatism of the Tate's acquisition policies. See John Richardson, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence and Douglas Cooper*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1999, p.25.

³⁰ Cooper, op. cit., p.69.

³¹ *Evening News*, March 3rd 1906, (page unknown – SSS).

³² Douglas Cooper, op. cit., p.70.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ernest Short, op. cit., pp.254-5.

³⁵ Both volumes were first published by Eyre and Spottiswoode.

³⁶ Harrison mentions Sims once in a footnote in a list of artists associated with the Imperial War Museum's Hall of Remembrance scheme, and it is clear that Sims' *The Old German Frontline at Arras* was one of the works that Harrison regarded as 'without much merit.' Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, Second Edition 1994, pp.359-60 note no.12, first published in 1981, Dennis Farr, *English Art 1870-1940*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, Frances Spalding *British Art Since 1900*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.

³⁷ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, op. cit., p.154.

³⁸ John Christian, ed., *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art, Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer*, London: Lund Humphries, in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1989, p.12.

³⁹ This obviously caused some controversy. The *Daily Sketch* printed a photograph of the six women and reproduced Tatham's painting. (SSS).

⁴⁰ According to John Sims, both sisters, but particularly Doris, became family friends and kept in contact with Agnes and Alan after Sims' death. Agnes' diary mentions the 'Zinks' coming to tea regularly from c1922 onwards.

⁴¹ See Theo Cowdell, *The Role of the Royal Academy in English Art* op. cit., p.54. *The Times*, Letter to the Editor from the RA Students, dated April 19th 1928, published April 25th 1928, p.12.

⁴² Unknown publication, (SSS) 1911.

⁴³ As an Academician Philpot was automatically entitled to exhibit six paintings, but his *Great Pan* was refused entry on the grounds that it was too erotic.

⁴⁴ As reproduced in J. G. P. Delaney, *Glyn Philpot: His Life and Art*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p.123.

⁴⁵ Charles Sims in Sims op. cit., p.54.

⁴⁶ Both of these landscapes are illustrated in Sims' *Picture Making*. *A Kentish Hop-Garden* is dated 1916 and *Lodsworth from River* is undated but Alan Sims describes it as 'a glimpse of the Terrestrial Paradise after the war.' Sims, op. cit., facing p.113.

⁴⁷ Charles Sims as quoted by Percy Lumley-Ellis in the *Daily Mail*, undated, 1928, (SSS).

⁴⁸ *The Globe*, undated 1908 (SSS) and undecipherable publication, c.1922 (SSS).

Appendix A:

SIMS STUDIO DIARY: 1895-1917

(with cross-referenced additions from Agnes' Social Diary and Alan Sims 1887-1928)

- 1887** *(aged 14) Sent to Paris as commission agent for 1 year*
- 1888** *Learnt shorthand in Holloway country house. Apprentice to engravers for short time.*
- 1890** *Government Art Schools for 1 year.*
- 1891** *Julian's in Paris for 2 years.*
- 1892** *Back in England.*
- 1893** *Autumn entered RA Schools – 1895*

1895

(17 Fitzroy Street, London W)

- | | | |
|---|---------|--|
| A May Day | 54 x 30 | commenced July
Exhibited Bradford Jan 1896
Given to H. Bickerton Esq. 1898 |
| "What are These to you and me, who deeply drink of Wine?" | 45 x 32 | commenced in August
exhibited Leeds Jan 1896
Sold £35 |
| Portrait of Miss Kate Sims (12 sittings) | 45 x 32 | commenced in August
Exhibited RA 1896
Presented to S. Sims Esq. |
| Portraits of 6 people in a Music Room (Unfinished) | 45 x 32 | commenced in November
Received on commission £10
Mrs. Howell |

1896

(17 Fitzroy Street, London W)

- 1896** *20th July to Berwick with Agnes MacWhirter*
 20th-21st August to Edinburgh

The Vine	96 x 54	commenced in January Exhibited RA 1896 Liverpool 1896 Bradford 1897 York 1897 Oldham 1898 Manchester 1898 St Petersburg 1899
Roses and Diamonds	36 x 28(?)	commenced in May Exhibited Aberdeen 1896 Leeds 1897
Portraits of the Misses Strauss	36 x 30(?)	commenced in April
Portrait of Stephen Sims	36 x 28(?)	presented to Mrs Sims Commission £50
Love and a Student (Unfinished)	45 x 32	commenced in June Given to S. Sims Esq. 1898
A Blue Day, Berwickshire	60 x 50	commenced in October Exhibited Birmingham 1897 Worcester 1898 Oldham 1899
Childhood	96 x 54	commenced in October Exhibited RA 1897 Liverpool 1897 Southport 1898 Manchester 1898 Paris Salon 1900 (3eme Medaille) Sold 2000frs Acquired par L'Etat for the Luxembourg
Portrait of Mrs Sims	54 x 36	commenced in December Rejected RA 1897 Given to S. Sims Esq. 1898

1897

(Removed, March 24th to 4 Addison Studios, Blyth Rd. Hammersmith)

1897

21st January married Agnes

28th July Still-born son

15th-27th September to Holland with Agnes

Convalescence	30 x 20	commenced in April Sold £50 (R. Menzies Esq.)
The Idler	24 x 12	commenced in April (Unfinished)
Wedding Bells	54 x 30	commenced in June

		Exhibited International Soc. Of S.A 1898 Aberdeen 1898 Oldham 1899 Southport 1899
The Little Old Man of the Sea	30 x 25	commenced in June (Failure)
A Fairy Wooing	54 x 36	commenced in July Exhibited RA 1898 Guildhall 1899
Childhood (etching)	24 x 13	Sold £150 (Fairfax Rhodes Esq) commenced in September Failure
The Fates (etching)	12 x 9	commenced in November Sold 12 copies (1898)

1898

1898

*7th – 14th April to Margate?
15th – 24th April at Wargrave
14th – 20th May at Balcombe
30th July – 17th August Cornwall
17th October John born*

Portrait of Mrs Sims	54 x 36	commenced in January Exhibited RA 1898 Sold £50 (J. MacWhirter Esq. RA)
A Moorish maiden	24 x 20 (?)	painted in May Sold £15 (C. Winn Esq.)
Love in Idleness	9 x 6 (?)	painted in July Sold £15 (Dr Farquharson MP)
Love and a Student	45 x 32	painted in July and August Exhibited Aberdeen 1898 Altered and exhibited at NEAC Spring 1899
The Kingdom of Heaven	60 x 50	Sold £55 (Patrick Ness Esq.) 1899 commenced in September Exhibited at RA 1899
The Morning's News	20 x 16	Sold £150 (David Murray Esq. ARA) painted in September in the garden at 1 Abbey Rd, St John's Wood Exhibited at NEAC 1898 Sold £25 less 7 ½% (Unknown – New South Wales Corporation)
The Garden Gate	24 x 18	painted same time as preceding in the afternoons

Portrait of Myself	20 x 16	Rejected RA 1899 Sold £5 (S. Sims Esq.) 1900 laid in in July Unfinished
"The World Between"		Etching – Failure
A Betrothal		Etching – Failure
Epithalamium	36 x 24	commenced in autumn Unfinished
Portrait of Helen MacWhirter	20 x 16	commenced in Winter Failure
April Fairies	24 x 16 (?)	painted in June Exhibited at NEAC autumn Sold £20 (Harry Lawrence Esq.)

1899

(Removed March to St. Lawrence, Southminster, Essex)

Pond and Oak Tree	24 x 20	commenced and finished April Copy of Nature
The Interrupted Picnic	24 x 18	Landscape with C. in April Small figures finished Nov. 1900 Inspired by Turner's atmospheric gradation and multiplicity of incident also his exaggeration Sold £20 (S. Sims Esq.)
The Grey Hedge Row	30 x 20	landscape in April (an experiment in painting without spectacles) unchanged copy Unfinished
Romance	20 x 26	commenced in June A woman singing in moonlight, others watching in mysterious shade of trees Failure (bad composition)
Scene from Twelfth Night	34 x 27	commenced in May, finished in July Commission from H. Lawrence but remained unsold, occupied more than a month of constant work
Spring Night	30 x 20	commenced in June Failure
Mother and Child	37 x 27	commenced in July Mrs. S and John in deckchair, cottage background, evening Occupied many evenings Failure (ugly composition and bad

Bradwell		painting)
Morning	24 x 16	commenced in May – sketch
In the Fields	30 x 25	commenced in June – sketch
		commenced in May
		Recommenced in July – summer
		Effect
		Exhibited NEAC Autumn 1899
		Sold £25 (S. Sims Esq.)
Moonsetting (study)	37 x 27	commenced in July
An Old Barn, Water Coln	9 x 7	painted in July (evenings)
		£3, 3,0 (S. Sims Esq.)
In Elysium	82 x 54	commenced in July, fin. March 1900
		Altered by taking out male figure
		and replacing by statue and altering
		pose of centre female figure
		Exhibited RA 1900
		Paris Salon 1901
Portrait of Mrs MacWhirter	50 x 37	Exhibited Melbourne
		£30
Portrait of Mrs MacKinnon	50 x 37	Exhibited Melbourne
		£30
Portraits of Mr and Mrs MacKinnon		
Senior, from photographs	20 x 16	£30 for two

1900

1900

13th – 25th April to Paris

Apple Blossom	20 x 16	May
		Exhibited Aberdeen 1900
Portrait of Alfred Hewin Esq.	24 x 20	May
		£31.10.
A Morning Walk	46 x 31 ½	commenced June, fin. July
		Exhibited Aberdeen 1900
		Leeds 1901
Portrait of Mrs de Pass	50 x 37	June
		£52.10.0
The Bouquet	30 x 20	July
Also "Cinderella"	30 x 24	(Failures - bad composition)
Spreading their Wings	117 x 74	commenced July
		Exhibited RA 1901
Winter Flowers	20 x 16	August
		Exhibited Aberdeen 1900
Hide and Seek	36 x 24	September
		Unfinished
What cared we for wind and		

Weather?	30 x 20	September
Baby's bath	16 x 12	September
		Presented RASC for raffle, won by Lanchester
The Great Gateway	37 x 27	November
		Unfinished
Portrait of Myself	14 x 12(?)	September
		£15 for the library of J. MacWhirter RA

1901

1901

28th April Alan born

Portrait of John Sims	54 x 36	rejected RA
The Mirror	20 x 16	exchanged with H. Poole for his Aphrodite
Portrait of Gerald Lawrence as Orsius	36 x 20	Exhibited NEAC
Land of Nod	36 x 24	Sketch
The Mirror	36 x 20	Sketch (unfinished)
A Fairy Wooing	16 x 12	Watercolour replica
		Exhibited Leeds 1902
		£10 Mrs. Marks
Top o' the Hill	36 x 28	Exhibited RA
		Sold £100 corporation of Durban S.A
The Mirror		Sketch (more time wasted)
Moonlight	20 x 16	(unsaleable but rather nice)
		Rolled up
Twilight	28 x 18	(Marshes at Stansgate)
The Nest	36 x 28	John sitting in long grass looking at Bird's nest
		Sold Mrs. MacWhirter £50
Snow Scene	22 x 16	Sketch
Moorhen	16 x 12	Sketch
Frosty Morning	30 x 20	Two sketches
The Barn (watercolour)	12 x 6	S. Sims £3 (crossed out)
Portrait of Mrs. Gerald Lawrence	30 x 24	(Oval)

1902

1902

9th January moved to London – 8, Grand Parade

August Arran

September Musselburgh and Edinburgh

Portrait of Mrs. Sims	54 x 48	Exhibited RA 190?
A Portrait of myself		For practice (rolled up)
Land of Nod	54 x 48	A pale version
		Discarded for RA picture wing (?)
Portrait of Mrs. Omallaney (?)		lessons in portraiture £10
Portrait of Mrs. Braithwaite and Joyce Lawrence	40 x 30	painted out of doors
		£100 Sidney Braithwaite Esq.
Top o' the Hill (replica)	36 x 28	£60 Charles Moore Esq.
The Trysting (?) Stone		Exhibited Leeds. Rolled up
Summer afternoon	36 x 28	Sold to Sidney Ford Esq. For Peter Maritzburg S.A Corporation Gallery
		£30
On the Rocks	36 x 28	Glasgow 1903
		Worcester 1903
The Sting	20 x 16	unfinished
The Heather Cross	36 x 28	Glasgow 1903
		Leicester Galleries 1910
		Sold £100 James Murray Esq.(-25%)
Playmates	36 x 28	Exhibited RA 1903
		Pittsburgh 1904
		Sold in 1914 R. Wadsworth (?)
		Blackburn £60
The World Between	35 x 27	destroyed 1914

1903

1903

*Charles in Paris 29th March – 25th April
2nd August – 15th September Arran
Back to 8, Grand Parade
9th – 22nd November St Andrews*

Water Babies	47 x 32	Exhibited RA 1903
		St Louis 1904
		Hull 1906
		Glasgow 1907
		Bristol 1908 – Sold £80
Glass of raplio (?)		
Cavedweller's God		
Punchbeck Orientals		
Philos of hero (?) Bacchanal Pillow fight		4 drawings
Etchings		Bathers
		Cavedweller's God
		Punchbeck Orientals (1)
Two Christmas cards		Children and Turkey
		The Death of the Year

Portrait of Alan J. MacWhirter	36 x 28	Exhib. Society of Portrait Painters 190?
Portrait of John Bacchus and Ariadne	30 x 20	Nell's wedding present circular Exhib. at Leicester Galleries 1906 Aberdeen 1906 Sold J. MacWhirter Esq. £36 Edenholme, Stoneharn (?)
Sunshine and Wind	20 x 16	Exhib. Institute of Oil Painters Leicester Galleries 1906 Leeds 1905 Sold £25 (- 30%) Honourable John Collier
Amateur Oarsmen	30 x 20	Exhib. Institute of Oil Painters Malcolm Baird £20
Portrait of Mrs. Mauritz	36 x 28	Exhib. RSA Edinburgh 1903 + 4? Painted at St Andrews £65 less expenses
Sand Babies Butterflies	20 x 16	Exchanged with Goscombe John RA 1904 Bradford (?) 1904 Liverpool 1904 Pittsburgh 1905 Sold £80 Mrs. Mond £20 S. Sims
Portrait of Kate's three children	24 x 20	

1904

1904

10th – 27th July Charles at Etaples

9th – 30th August Paris Plage

14th August Le Touquet

4th – 17th September Paris Plage

24th September Montreuil (see address below, could mean this)

9th December London

22nd and 27th December Paris Plage

The Philosopher	36 x 28	Institute of Oil Painters 1904 Glasgow 1904
A Sunny Beach (watercolour)	16 x 22	(Family stood on Arran shore) Sold £10 with a Faery kiss Mrs. Marks
Women and Parrots	25 x 20	
Design for ceiling of Cardiff Town Hall (watercolour)		
6 Drawings for John Lane "Isabella"		rejected them gave me £3
Bacchus and Ariadne	54 x 36	

(went to Etaples for August – 9, Rue de Montreuil)

Evensong	36 x 28	scraped out old man
Washing Day	21 x 17	panel
Washerwomen	20 x 16	both sold to J. McCulloch £35
		Exhib. NEAC
Soda and Milk	36 x 28	RA 1905
		Liverpool 1905
		Glasgow 1906
		Birmingham 1906
		Leeds 1907

(at Etaples until March 1905)

Washerwomen	given to Mrs. Lawrence for Wedding present 1910
-------------	--

1905

1905

4th January Paris Plage
22nd – 25th February Charles to London
24th March (had spent?) 7 ½ months at Etaples
28th May Blankenburgh
2nd – 4th June Liege, Brussels
6th August Croothaus
21st August Knolke (?)
24th August leave Bruges for home
29th September to Sandroock Cottage, Fittleworth
Christmas at Abbey Road
27th December back to Fittleworth

The Kite	36 x 28	RA 1905 Sold J. McCulloch £60 Fetched £500 at Christies
Watercolour copy	21 x 14	to H. Mileham, wedding present
Watercolour copy	9 x 9	on Japanese paper for exhibition at Leicester Galleries 1906
Washing Day	36 x 28	sold Leicester Gallery 1906 £? Less commission

Went to Bruges – Rue Mond du Salon, Madame de Jonghe, Mdelle Sandoif – 9, Rue du Saul Esprit

To Sandroock Cottage, Fittleworth (September 29th)

By the Arran Sea	24 x 20	for exhibition at Agnew's (Some examples of Independent art English Scotch Instit.)
Plage (watercolour)	15 x 7	Sold to Agnew £35 given to Bristol for sale towards ? of Picture Gallery
Fishes/vilo(?) oil	c16 x 13	Leicester Galleries 1910 50 guineas – 25%
Etaples (tempera and oil)		Leicester Galleries 1910 40 guineas – 25%

1906

1906

Still Fittleworth

26th April – 6th May Charles painting portraits in Essex

8th May Paris

Summer Fittleworth?

21st – 25th November to London to paint portrait

The Land of Nod		RA Liverpool Sold £100 Mrs. Hearts(?) New York
Portraits of:		
Cecil John Evelyn		£50 - £7.10
The Hon. Mrs. Ives		£100
Gordon Gerard		£50
Sir Robert Walker		£30
John Walker		£30
Ronald Walker		£30
Cicely Walker		£30
The Kiss		Exhib. Institute of Oil Painters Sold Mrs. Stuart of Blair Gardens £60 – 12 1/2 %
The Little Faun		Exhib. Institute of Oil painters Mrs. Hosheim(?) £35 – 12 1/2 %
The Farm Kitchen		Sold E. Brown Leicester Galleries £50
The Magic Well		watercolour RA 1907 Tour in Germany 1908 Mrs. Gibson £25
The Swing		watercolour To J. MacWhirter Esq.
An Island Festival	77 x 115	RA Liverpool Paris Salon 1908

The Swimmer		White City 1909 Crystal Palace 1910 Sold 1916 to National Gallery of New South Wales for £500 watercolour Goupil 1907 RA 1908 Sold J. Murray MP Aberdeen £50
Portrait (head) of Percy Stuart Esq.	30 x 16	Try Hall, Pocklington £30
Portrait of Miss Narburton Wingate		Full length, lifesize 60, St. Andrews St. Cantedys (?) £50
The Land of Nod	30 x 20	watercolour replica Leicester Galleries 1910 Sold £80 – 25%

1907

1907

May 4th-24th Italy
Studio article by Baldry on CS

On the Rocks		Mrs. T Wevitt (?) for New Zealand £60
Romance (tempera)		Institute of Oil Painters
The Storm (tempera)		Pomeroy ARA Institute of Oil painters £50 – 12 ½ %
April		Institute of Oil Painters Hull Cheltenham Sold Dr. Carter, Oriel Lodge, Cheltenham £75 – 10%
Portrait of Charles Bryce Esq.		
Portrait of Mrs. Bryce		
Portrait of Miss Ives		Three for £90
Portrait of Mrs. Luke		£50
Harold Phillips Esq.		
Mrs. H. Phillips		
Mrs. Bryce		Three for £160
Mr. Evelyn Esq.		
Mrs. Evelyn		Two for £80
The Terrace, Bruges		watercolour Sold to Mrs. Evelyn for £26.5
Portrait of Mrs. Phillimine and baby		£120
Romance (The Nightingales)		Oil

Little Faun (large)	50 x 40	Leicester Galleries £100 – 25% RA 1908
The Fountain (oil)	36 x 28	Sold W. Naumann £400 sold Harold Phillips Esq. 77, Cadogan Place £150 – 25%
The Swing April (watercolour, with drapery flung over tree) Jack Frost (watercolour, improved)		Sold to Fairfax Rhodes 1908 £40 £20 sold Mrs. Wood Exhib. at Browns (?) Oldham 1908 Aberdeen 1907 Sold by C. West £60
Gypsies (watercolour)		Mrs. Frank Gibson Charles Terrace, Regents Park £25
Aecarmane (?) (tempera and oil)	c16 x 12	Leicester Galleries £60 – 25%

1908

1908

23rd January elected ARA

2nd April Charles to Paris painting Mrs Bryce and Mrs Phillips

2nd May Fittleworth

27th – 28th June Charles to Paris Plage to look at rooms

Moves between London, Fittleworth and Belgium

25th September to Lodsworth

1st Dec in London with Fairfax Rhodes

The Fountain	50 x 40	oil RA Chantrey Bequest £400
Portraits painted in Paris For Mrs. Bryce Mrs. Phillips Mrs. Bryce Mrs. Phillips and baby Mrs. Fairford		full lengths, £240 watercolour £15 full length, in Paris at Brumery's Studio
Mrs. Fairford		head
Mr. Fairford		head
Mrs. Bryce		head (watercolour) all for £245
Madame Diaz		¾ at 10, Rue Bassaux
Madame de Caselleja		¾ both for £320
Julia	36 x 28	oil £100
The Ballet in Arcadia	30 x 24	oil £70 both commissioned by R. Hayne, Fordington, Dorchester
The Golden Temple		Sold to Mrs. Mond 1909 £40

Ephemera	24 x 20	tempera RA 1909 Sold to Sir Edmund Busk, Sussex Place, Regents Park for £150
Portrait of Fairfax Rhodes Esq.	60 x 36	oil £250

1909

1909

*22nd May Peter born
5th July starts teaching at RA Schools
4th November to London
25th November "Home to Lodsworth"*

Portrait of Robert Nuttall	24 x 20	tempera finished in oil £150 (varnished)
Julia (in tempera)	36 x 28	RA 1909 Glasgow 1910 Pittsburgh 1911
Epilogue	24 x 16	tempera and a little oil Bought by O? R. Parsons Esq. 42, Draycott Place, Cadogan Gardens £60
The Beautiful is Fled	20 x 16	tempera and oil Leicester Galleries £75 – 25%
Summer Night	c20 x 12	watercolour Leicester Galleries Hull
Summer	c16 x 12	Bradford 1916 watercolour Leicester Galleries Plymouth
L'Amour Veille	c20 x 15	watercolour and pastel Drawn in red chalk Sold to Mrs. Bryce for £50 114 Av. Des Champs Elysees
Portrait of Charles Bryce	30 x 25	£50
Robin on the Spout	36 x 28	oil £200 (both to Mrs. Bryce)
Robin on the Spout	30 x 20	watercolour and pastel Comm. By Rev. J. R. Bucklebank Hillside, Warminster £78 RWS 1911
The Chase	20 x 15	watercolour
Boys Bathing – Morning	20 x 15	watercolour both sold to R. Hague Esq. Fordington, Dorchester. £60 the two. RA 1910
Mischief	36 x 28	oil and tempera

Tumble Froth and Fun	c22 x 20	Sold to R. Hayne £100 (£60 on account) watercolour sold to Miss Grigg 53, Sloane Square £40
Portrait of Mrs. Hayes Sadler		£250
The Terrace	c12 x 10	watercolour Leicester Galleries £25 – 25%
Myrionima (?)	c20 x 16	tempera and oil Leicester Galleries £80 – 25%
Marish Flowers	c6 x 6	Fairfax Rhodes tempera and oil Leicester Galleries £40 – 25%
Senca	c15 x 18	George Wood Esq. Cambridge watercolour Exchanged with A. H. Pepram(?)
Child Worship	c18 x 12	ARA tempera and oil Leicester Galleries
Nitocres (?) and Julia	8 x 6	Sold £100 Peter French (?) tempera and oil Leicester Galleries
The Quarry	c17 x 14	? Bryce Esq 120 guineas – 25% (chasing the fleet foot roe) Watercolour Leicester Galleries
Sap	36 x 28	Aberdeen Sold to Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool £25 ? and oil Leicester Galleries
The Chase	12	James Murray Esq. circular, tempera and oil Leicester Galleries
Lesbia	c17 x 14	Birmingham 1910 Hull 1911 Sold Venice 1912 £65 watercolour Liverpool 1916?
Death of the Year	24 x 16	Leicester Galleries tempera and oil Leicester Galleries
Pastorella	21 x 14	Worcester Rochdale Sold New Zealand £60 1 st Prize £300 and gold medal

Mother Worship		At Pittsburgh 1912 Leicester Galleries Marchant? Sold Mr. W. S. Stimmel £160 Leicester Galleries Toronto
Morning, Corot Sur Moy	20 x 16	Leicester Galleries James Murray £35

1910

1910

4th February Charles speaks at Art Workers Guild
12th April Charles to London to hang exhibition (Leicester Galls)
August/ early September Scotland (with Agnes?)
15th September to Lodsworth
25th November Charles to see Kenneth Clark

Frolic	30 x 20	tempera and oil Leicester Galleries 1910 Herbert French Esq £100 – 25%
January Sunrise	c14 x 9	watercolour RWS 1912 £20 – 15%
Sunshine	20 x 16	oil Leicester Galleries 1910 80 guineas
Tumble Froth and Fun	c20 x 16	pastel and watercolour Leicester Galleries Mrs. Harold Phillips 25 guineas – 25%
Sunset	c10 x 8	watercolour Leicester Galleries Mrs. ? Mond 30 guineas
Dayspring	c11 x 7	watercolour Leicester Galleries £30
Evening	c8 x 6	watercolour Leicester Galleries £25
Portrait of G? children	30 x 20	£100
Wedding of Sylvanus	30 x 20	watercolour RWS 1911 £100
Tempera sketch for same		New York 1916 c£30
Legend	c48 x 36	tempera and oil RA 1911 James Murray Esq. £500
Spring Muse	24 x 16	tempera and oil Auckland, New Zealand 1913

Cupid and Causpaspe?		RA 1912 Bradford 1911 Aberdeen 1910 Duc de Siecle du Henri Martin, Paris £150 Glasgow 1911
Sketch for same (watercolour)		RWS 1916 sold £25 - %
Teasing	36 x 24	tempera and oil Kenneth Clark Esq. £200
The Crabapple Tree	30 x 24	oil RA 1911 R. Haynes Esq. £100 Copyright to Berlin Photographic Co £25 1914
"Cupid was a Kentish Lad"	8 x 6	George Wood Esq. Cambridge £40
Three sketches		to A. Lumley Esq. £30

1911

1911

end of January McWhirter dies

12th – 18th May France – Abbeville, Amiens, Rouen, Paris

20th May home to Lodsworth

30th May painting KC at Sudbourne, Suffolk

30th May – 3rd July Charles to Lines (?) as guest of Archit. Assoc.

"Gentle Love loose not thy..."	36 x 28	oil Zachary Merton Esq. Green Street, Park Lane £200
Portrait of Baron von Rigal	60 x 36	Sodertery (?) £200
Portrait of Tom Bryce	c50 x 40	Mrs. Bryce, 114 Av. Des Champs Elysees, Paris. £150
The House of Juno	30 x 20	watercolour Rev. J. W. R. Brocklebank £100
The Shower	54 x 34	RA 1912 James Murray Esq. £500 (now at Aberdeen)
Portrait of Kenneth Clark	36 x 28	painted at Sudbourne RA 1912 £200
Where stray go muses...	imperial	watercolour RA 1912 Gustav Tuck Esq. £100
Portrait of Peter Sims	16 x 12	
Portrait of Betty Hayes Sadler	60 x 40	RA 1912 Fairfax Rhodes £500
Morning Walk	10 x 8	watercolour

Love the hunter	imperial	RWS 1912 Emel Waterton(?) RA £20 watercolour RWS 1912 Venice 1912 Berlin 1914
Three pastel and watercolours		girl and Amorend(?) on Terrace after rain one exhibited RWS
Ianthe	12 x 12	oil Bradford 1911 Rochdale 1912 Goupil, sold £60 – 25%
Romantic Landscape	8 x 6	Bradford 1912
Frosty Morning Fittleworth	10 x 10	Bradford 1912
Evening of Bruges	24 x 19	Bradford 1912
Rain	15 x 14	watercolour RWS £15 – 15%
Decorative panel for Chelsea Town Hall – “History”		£200

1912

1912 *14th – 28th May to France – Paris, Avignon, Arles, St Remy and Nimes*
29th May back to Lodsworth
9th – 23rd August to Musselburgh, Berwick, Melrose
“Home to Lodsworth”

After Rain	imperial	watercolour RA 1913 Liverpool 1913 B. Potelachin(?) Nr. Manchester
Wood Beyond the World	60 x 40	Tempera and oil/wax (oiled out copal varnish) RA 1913 Liverpool 1913 Chantrey Bequest £800
Love in the Wilderness	36 x 28	Tempera and oil (linseed and turps) (oiled out copal varnish) RA 1913 J. Buchanan Esq. £300
The Month of Mary	36 x 28	Tempera and oil (linseed and turps) (oiled out linseed) Bristol 1913

		RA 1913 Pittsburgh 1914 Tempera and oil (linseed and turps) (oiled out copal medium)
The Sweet o' the Year	54 x 36	RA 1913
		Bristol 1913 tempera and oil (wax and copal medium) (oiled out copal medium)
The Coming of Spring		Grafton Gallery 1912 Pittsburgh 1913 Bristol 1916
Portrait of Mrs. Sims	60 x 36	Tempera and oil RA 1913
		Liverpool 1913
Love Locked out	imperial	watercolour Lloyd 5(?) 15 Albany, £90 – 15%
The Waterfall	½ imperial	Wolf Harris Esq. £50
Girl Mocking Statue of Cupid	30 x 20	oil over Rowney's tempera "She is not subject to love's tow" W. Ford Esq. Hull £50
Feeding Chickens	imperial	watercolour RWS 1913 Glasgow 1913 Sold J. Coutts Michie £80
Bleaching	imperial	watercolour RWS 1913 Sold £40
Two sketches to a Lady		(a nude? Study watercolou) Sketch for picture, watercolour £20
Forest Trees		Oldham 1912 Auckland NZ 1913 Goupil Gallery 1916
Swallows	36 x 24	commission from A. G. Temple for Melbourne or Sydney. Received payment but picture returned for exchange or sale (£212.10)
watercolour version		sold RWS £80
Rain	imperial	watercolour Girl in black and white cloak and magpies sold RWS £20

1913

1913

Lodsworth, no holiday

Red Roses across the Moon	36 x 29	Rowney's tempera on oil canvas rubbed onto Buin?ing medium continued with egg tempera
The Valley of Little Beginnings	14 x 12?	Goupil Gallery Sold £120 – commission
The Muse of the Children (Clio and the children 1914)	72 x 48	Diploma Picture RA 1916
Bleaching	30 x 20	oil W. Ford, 50 Coltman Street, Hull (commission) £52.10
La Cage aux Amours	72 x 48	Tempera and oil/wax (rubbed over with Rowney's Tempera medium to make it dull) (oiled out varnish with copal medium) RA 1914
The Penitent	10 x 8	Tempera, oil and wax RA 1914
Spring Song	36 x 28	Tempera, oil and wax RA 1914 Sold Mrs. G. Noble 81 Vincent Square 1915, £200
The Little Archer	36 x 28	Tempera, oil and wax RA 1914 Robert Younger Esq. K.C £400
Spring Song		tempera study, figure draped RWS 1913 (return?) Sold £30 - %
Trophy	imperial	watercolour RWS 1913 autumn Sent to Germany, returned by dealer After war broke out Sold, Red Cross Sale at Christies £73.10
Basket of Flowers	½ imperial	watercolour
Stormy Weather	½ imperial	RWS 1914 (autumn) Sold each £30
The Pavilion	35 x 25 oval	tempera RWS sold £40
Faun and Hamadryad	½ imperial	watercolour RWS 1914 Venice 1914
Over the Hills and Far Away	½ imperial	watercolour

The Coming of Spring	36 x 28	Venice 1914 tempera and oil Grovesnor Gallery 1913 In Berlin at outbreak of war, returned safely through Holland (see 1912)
The Swing	14 x 10?	Watercolour Sold Captain Phillips 2 Rutland Gate £30

1914

1914

7th October Lumley Ellis first appears

26th November John dies on HMS Bulwark

The Huntress	½ imperial (cut down)	watercolour sold RWS 1914 £30 less 12 ½ %
The Trophy	½ imperial	watercolour Sold RWS 1914 £25 less 12 ½ %
The Basket of Flowers	30 x 25	oil crimson drapery against light sky RA 1914 Sold £120 A. S. Brown Esq. The Bluff, Canford. Cliffs Bousnam
The Basket of Flowers	30 x 25	oil yellow drapery against the sky RA 1914 Sold £100 Oliver Brett Esq. Sussex Place, Hyde Park
The Basket of Flowers	c24 x 20	pencil drawing Background washed with blue RWS 1915 Sold New York 1916
Syrid and Pattatos	36 x 28	oil RA 1915
Syrid and Pattatos	10 x 8	tempera sketch RWS 1915 Sold £60 Charles Wum? Esq. Selly Hill, Birmingham Drawing for same sold New York 1916
Portrait of Mrs. MacWhirter A Rose	c21 x 18 c19 x 13	oil watercolour Given to Mrs. Baird
Portrait of Alan Sims	c15 x 12	oil over tempera on oil canvas

Love in Anger	10 x 8	(smooth) oil (over tempera)
On the Shore	36 x 28	Figure in wax copal sold to R. Haworth, Preston Road, Blackburn £150

1915

1915

7th May move to St. Pauls Studios, Baron's Court

Three sketches for the Seven

Sacraments:

Extreme Unction	33 x 28	
Penance	21 x 17	
Baptism	20 x 14	sold to Miles Hone £100
Two designs for Seven Sacraments	36 x 24	
Complete design for Seven Sacraments		
Iris	33 x 28	
	36 x 28	RA 1916 Sold £200 Mrs. Lloyd, Albany
Anthea	36 x 28	RA 1916 Sold £300 Lady Rocksavage
Ianthe	36 x 28	Sold £300 Rurelles? And Co. New York

(different colour versions of the same subject)

Pastoral	c33 x 28	RA 1915
Portrait of Mrs. Val Fleming	40 x 36	RA 1916 £200
The Seven Sacraments	36 x 28 each	Dowdeswells 1917
(Baptism, Extreme Unction, Confirmation, Orders, Communion, Marriage, Penance. Finished 1917)		
Landscape	c20 x 16	watercolour
Landscape	c10 x 7	watercolour Sold RWS £12 - %
Bathers	c10 x 7	watercolour Sold RWS £12
Portrait of Lieut. Lawson		(posthumous) For A.G.B.I Fund

1916

1916

17th May – 18th June Mrs. Fleming to sit

2nd – 28th August to Dymchurch

22nd September – 27th October Charles to Robertsbridge, Lord Rothermere

Portrait of Mrs. Val Fleming	(profile)	RA 1917 <i>The Embroideress</i> £100
The Necklace	c27 x 24	tempera RWS 1917 Sold £40
The Huntress		watercolour Given to sale in aid of St. Winistan's? Hostels
Stormy Weather	c24 x 16	watercolour
Salehurst Landscape	36 x 28	Lord Rothermere £50
Water farm, Robertsbridge	24 x 16	Lord Rothermere £50 RA 1917
The Stork that brought the Olive Branch	36 x 28	
Decoration "Crafts"	33ft x 16ft	for Arts and Crafts Exhibition Burlington House 1916

1917

1917 *25th July – 30th August to Dymchurch*
 5th – 16th December to France (Canadian Commission)

Greater Love hath No Man		for Medici Society Commission £100
Two Landscapes at Beneudeu		Lord Rothermere
Portrait of Peter Sims	40 x 36	Grovesnor Gallery 1917
Remembrance	72 x 48	
Prayer	36 x 28	
The Piping Boy	36 x 28	Grovesnor Gallery 1917

1918 *1st – 29th August Dymchurch*
 Charles in France at least 1st – 20th November (not in A's diary)

1919 *18th – 21st January with Lord Rothermere*
 30th July – 28th August to Arran
 18th December Charles to France

1920 *2nd March Charles to see Aston Webb re Keepership*
 29th May Mrs J appears in Agnes' diary
 31st May Charles starts duties as Keeper of RA
 12th – 14th June with Lord Rothermere
 2nd July with Lord R
 22nd July move to Burlington House
 30th July – 16th August at Dymchurch together
 16th August Charles to Ireland
 25th Dec Charles to Ireland

- 1921** *1st January Charles home (from Ireland?)*
29th December Charles to Belshurst until 2nd January
- 1922** *10th June Charles at Winchester with Sir Robert Younger*
12th June to Glasgow
13th July Charles to Frinton
30th July Charles to Aberdeen
1st September Charles to N. Berwick
- 1923** *16th January Mrs J divorce*
20th March Charles to Yorkshire
13th – 16th April Charles to Yorkshire with Mrs J
15th August Agnes to Edinburgh and N. Berwick (Mother?)
- 1924** *6th August Agnes to France with Peter (Charles?)*
3rd August to Aberdeen (Prof. Hay)
Charles at Windsor a great deal (Mrs. J's mother)
24th – 25th August Charles to Mrs. Younger
19th September Charles back from Yorkshire
26th September Charles to Windsor
12th December Charles to Monte Carlo
- 1925** *5th January Charles back (presumably from Monte Carlo)*
February, Agnes to France, Monte Carlo
9th – 20th April Charles to Windsor
29th May Agnes and Peter to Dymchurch
Charles to Windsor
18th – 26th June Charles to Paris
July Charles to Windsor
29th July – 31st Aug Charles to France
August Agnes to Loch Ave(?)
September Charles to Windsor
8th September "C comes Home"
5th October Charles' exhibition in NY opens (closes 17th)
30th October Charles back on the Majestic
17th December Charles goes to hotel
18th December Charles to Reading (Waddell children)
- 1926** *4th January "C comes home, leaves at 5 for Reading"*
11th January Charles home for day of meeting
28th March Charles to Como 12th April returns
Move from hotel to Athol House, Murray Place
3rd June Charles to Windsor (for last time?)
end July went to see Winchester Rd
18th – 21st August Charles to St. Margaret's bay to paint Mrs. Wragg
15th September Jeudwine/Ott. Stocker divorce final

11th September Charles to America, Pittsburgh, Chicago, NY
28th September Agnes moves to 14, Winchester Rd
November Charles gives up keepership of RA

1927

4th February Charles returns to Southampton on Majestic
24th June gives up occupancy of Burlington House
28th June St Stephens Hall panels unveiled
Littlefield 2nd June (few days) Paris 5th July, Littlefield 17th July
Spent 3 months of summer at Littlefield (must have been to Ravenswood around this time)
3rd September golf at Cruden Bay, Aberdeen "for a week at least and then Ravenswood again"
Ravenswood October – January? (4 months, see Mrs. Y. letter RA)
Then must have gone to London see corresp. 6.2.28 onwards

1928

6th February in London just arrived at Midland Grand Hotel
9th February – 16th February (at least) Athenaeum Club. Supposed to go to Robertsbridge with Rothermere
23rd February La Dragonniere, Cap Martin
Sunday 4th March? Still there, having spent 2 days with Mrs. Pringle at San Remo
3rd March Mrs. J remarries (reported in Times 9th March)
? 10th March La Drag. At San Remo every day?
14th March Party due to go to Rome
20th March Due to set out for Ravenswood
Friday 13th April dies

Appendix B: Leicester Galleries Exhibitions 1906 and 1910

**TRANSCRIPTION OF CATALOGUE OF WORKS IN THE LEICESTER
GALLERIES FEBRUARY - MARCH 1906**

(Northumbria Archive)

1	Thy time was the time of love	Sold
2	An infant of day	Sold
3	Jack Frost	
4	All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia	
5	There were giants in the earth in those days	
6	A land of brooks of water	Sold
7	He shall pass through the sea with affliction	Sold
8	A sound of battle in the Land	
9	A joyful mother of children	
10	The frog who showed himself alive	
11	He fashioneth their hearts alike	Sold
12	A little lower than the angels	Sold
13	This great and wide sea wherein are things	Sold
14	Beech Boughs	
15	They that tarried at home	
16	Clouds drop and distil abundance	
17	A sound of abundance of rain	Sold
18	A small thing in Thine Eyes	Sold

19	Of a sapphire blue, like the body of Heaven for clearness	Sold
20	Finding a ship sailing we went abroad	
21	They shall be chased as chaff before the wind	Sold
22	Having our bodies washed with pure water	Sold
23	Tis good to bear the yoke in youth	Sold
24	As sufferings abound, so consolation abounds	
25	The Sun knoweth his going down	
26	Washing Day	Sold
27	Virgins shall rejoice in the dance	Sold
28	Babies shall rule over them	Sold
29	Kindly in affection one to another	Sold
30	Wonders be known in the dark	Sold
31	Children of the day	Sold
32	A Land of darkness	
33	A Light to shine out of darkness	
34	Bacchus and Ariadne	
35	Aliens from the Commonwealth	Sold
36	What a day may bring forth	Sold
37	Her ways are the ways of pleasantness	Sold
38	The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself	Sold
39	A Portrait of Alan MacWhirter, Esq.	
40	Their souls shall be as a watered garden	

41	Hide thyself for a little moment	Sold
42	A serpent will bite without enchantment	Sold
43	The abundance of peace	
44	A frosty morning	
45	The Moon and Stars to rule by night	Sold
46	All the labour of man is for his mouth	
47	A Canal, Bruges	
48	The Exaltation of a flower	Sold
49	A beast that goeth into the valley by night	
50	Sunshine and Wind	Sold
51	Water Babies	Sold
52	I and children given me	
53	The Ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night	Sold
54	The moth catchers	Sold

**TRANSCRIPTION OF CATALOGUE OF WORKS IN THE LEICESTER
GALLERIES APRIL – MAY 1910**

(Tate Gallery Archive – no information available about sales)

- | | |
|----|------------------------------|
| 1 | A Summer Night |
| 2 | The Terrace |
| 3 | Myrionima |
| 4 | Marish Flowers |
| 5 | Serica |
| 6 | Fête de Nuit |
| 7 | The Nightingales |
| 8 | Æcarnene |
| 9 | The Astrologer and the Witch |
| 10 | Gipsies |
| 11 | Child Worship |
| 12 | Washerwomen |
| 13 | Plage |
| 14 | The Quarry |
| 15 | Frolic |
| 16 | Nitocris and Juba |
| 17 | January Sunrise |
| 18 | Sunshine |
| 19 | Sap |
| 20 | Romance |

- 21 'The Beautiful is Fled'
- 22 The Chase
- 23 Finished drawing for 'The Land of Nod'
- 24 Lesbia
- 25 The Death of the Year
- 26 Fisher Girls
- 27 Pastorella
- 28 Mother Worship
- 29 Etaples
- 30 Morning – Corot-sur-Moy
- 31 Summer
- 32 The Heather Crown
- 33 Mischief
- 34 Sunset
- 35 Study for 'An Island Festival'
- 36 Dayspring
- 37 L'Amour Veille
- 38 Evening
- 39 Finished study for 'The Fountain'

Appendix C:

NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY SIMS ARCHIVE

Studio Contents of Charles Sims RA (1873-1928) donated by his grandson John Sims

REPOSITORY REFERENCE CODE GB3025

Creator: Charles Sims RA (1873-1928)

Contents dates: c1890-1928

Quantity: 580 items

Level of description: Item level

Archive Listings produced by Cecilia Holmes 2004

Conservators: Emma Friendship and Colin Liddie

Works on Paper: GB3025/1

Printed reproductions: GB3025/1/1

GB3025/1/1/1	"And the Fairies..."	1919	12.5 x 18.5
GB3025/1/1/2	"And the Fairies..."	1919	12.5 x 18.5
GB3025/1/1/3	Colour print of <i>The Crabapple Tree</i>	1910	43 x 34
GB3025/1/1/4	The Little Archer	1913, looks to have come from <i>Graphic</i>	28 x 18.5
GB3025/1/1/5	The Shower Bath	Japanese influence	25 x 19
GB3025/1/1/6	The Shower Bath	Japanese influence	25 x 19

GB3025/1/1/7	“The Fox”	date unknown	10 x 14
GB3025/1/1/8	Programme, ‘Bull Dog Club’	1917	37.5 x 25
GB3025/1/1/9	Lady Rocksavage	Town and Country Dec 1 st 1925	34 x 24
GB3025/1/1/10	Portrait	unknown woman with winter landscape	17 x 11
GB3025/1/1/11	June	date unknown, shown in Tatler June 17 th 1925	32 x 50

Artist Prints: GB3025/1/2

GB3025/1/2/1	Mounted drypoint etching <i>The Fates</i>	1897	27 x 33.5
GB3025/1/2/2	Drypoint <i>The Fates</i>	1897	21.5 x 28.5
GB3025/1/2/3	Cliché verre of lady artist and nude female model	Quasi Japanese, Beardsleyesque	23 x 17.5
GB3025/1/2/4	Japanese influenced print	Cliché verre	20 x 25
GB3025/1/2/5	Japanese influenced print		20 x 25
GB3025/1/2/6	Drypoint of couple by starlight		19 x 26.5
GB3025/1/2/7	Print of couple by starlight	Reminiscent of Hackers <i>The Cloud</i>	17.5 x 24.5

GB3025/1/2/8	Print of couple by starlight	Reminiscent of Hackers <i>The Cloud</i>	17.5 x 24.5
GB3025/1/2/9	Print – couple in bedroom		16.5 x 21.5
GB3025/1/2/10	Couple in bedroom, with hand tinting		16.5 x 21.5
GB3025/1/2/11	Print, couple with shield and spear		16.5 x 12
GB3025/1/2/12	A Cup of Tea		25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/13	A Cup of Tea	Faint sketch of one of figures from Sargent's <i>Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose</i> – possibly not by Sims	25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/14	A Cup of Tea		25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/15	A Cup of Tea		25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/16	A Cup of Tea		25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/17	A Cup of Tea		25 x 18
GB3025/1/2/18	Print	Pencil and ink additions to image, extensive graphite marks on verso – looks like preparation for tracing	20 x 25
GB3025/1/2/19	Print of three male figures, one nude, two draped		19 x 20.5

GB3025/1/2/20	Study of girl playing lute	Silverpoint?	24 x 20
GB3025/1/2/21	Arran	Cliché verre?	16 x 19.5
GB3025/1/2/22	Lithograph of mother and two children having pillow fight		16 x 19.5
GB3025/1/2/23	Large sepia print of <i>Mischief</i> 1909	Signed in pencil and inscribed <i>With all good wishes for 1911</i>	38 x 48
GB3025/1/2/24	Print of <i>Bacchanal</i> see C3 no. 4		16 x 21.5
GB3025/1/2/27	Handtinted (with pastel) photogravure print of <i>Gentle love loose not thy dart...</i>	Reversed. Pencil notes in margins. c. 1911	48 x 62
GB3025/1/2/28	<i>Love in the Wilderness</i>	First proof drypoint	19 x 28
GB3025/1/2/29	<i>Over the Hills and Far Away</i> etching	Titled on verso and priced at \$12 in pencil – 1913	15 x 10
GB3025/1/2/30	<i>Over the Hills and Far Away</i> etching		15 x 10
GB3025/1/2/31	Aquatint of <i>The Little Archer</i> 1913		21 x 16
GB3025/1/2/32	Aquatint of <i>Iris</i>	1921	28 x 34
GB3025/1/2/33	Aquatint of <i>Iris</i>	1921	28 x 34

GB3025/1/2/34	Drypoint and Aquatint of <i>The Wood Beyond the World</i>	1921	32 x 45
GB3025/1/2/35	Drypoint and Aquatint of <i>The Wood Beyond the World</i>	1921	32 x 45
GB3025/1/2/36	Drypoint and Aquatint of <i>La Cage aux Amours</i>	1921	50 x 34
GB3025/1/2/37	Drypoint and Aquatint of <i>La Cage aux Amours</i>	1921	50 x 34
GB3025/1/2/38	Aquatint with pastel tinting	<i>And the Fairies ran away with their clothes</i> c.1904	25 x 32
GB3025/1/2/39	Handtinted aquatint	B&W duplicate on verso	43 x 26
GB3025/1/2/40	Hand tinted drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i>	1921	30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/41	<i>Epilogue</i>	1921	30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/42	Early version of <i>Iris</i> drypoint and aquatint		28 x 34
GB3025/1/2/43	Aquatint <i>And the Fairies ran away with their clothes</i>	C1921 Hand tinted with watercolour, titled in pencil on verso	25 x 33
GB3025/1/2/44	Drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i>	1921. Four colours of ink	30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/46	Drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i>		30 x 25

GB3025/1/2/47	Drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i>		30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/48	Drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i>		30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/50	Drypoint and aquatint of <i>Epilogue</i> in two pieces	has a sepia ink sketch of <i>The Coming of Spring</i> on verso 13 x 20	30 x 25
GB3025/1/2/51	Lithograph of Professor Hay		51 x 38
Photographs: GB3025/1/3			
GB3025/1/3/1	"What are ..."	1895	14 x 20
GB3025/1/3/2	"What are ..."	1895	13.5 x 20
GB3025/1/3/3	"What are ..."	1895	13.5 x 20
GB3025/1/3/4	"What are ..."	1895	13.5 x 20
GB3025/1/3/5	End of May Day	date unknown, c1896	20 x 10
GB3025/1/3/6	End of May Day	c1896	20 x 10
GB3025/1/3/7	The Vine	1896	11.5 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/8	Childhood	1896	14.5 x 23.5
GB3025/1/3/9	Wedding Bells	1897	10.5 x 19
GB3025/1/3/10	The Kingdom of Heaven	1898	22 x 18.5

GB3025/1/3/11	Portrait	<i>Mrs. Sims of Hammersmith</i> 1898	19.5 x 8.5
GB3025/1/3/12	Portrait	Mrs. Braithwaite and Joyce Lawrence 1902	23.5 x 26
GB3025/1/3/13	Arran	1902	10.5 x 17
GB3025/1/3/14	Arran	Agnes 1902 – Playmates	14.5 x 10.5
GB3025/1/3/15	Arran	John 1902 – Playmates	10 x 17
GB3025/1/3/16	Playmates	1902	18 x 23.5
GB3025/1/3/17	Arran	3 in boat	11 x 17
GB3025/1/3/18	Arran	Alan 1902 – “And the Fairies...”	11 x 17
GB3025/1/3/19	Arran	Agnes combing hair	21.5 x 17
GB3025/1/3/20	Arran	both boys on beach	11 x 17
GB3025/1/3/21	Agnes	“And the Fairies...”	17 x 21
GB3025/1/3/22	Arran	Agnes and John	17 x 10
GB3025/1/3/23	Agnes with Headscarf x2		17 x 11
GB3025/1/3/24	Agnes	<i>The Top o’ the Hill</i>	17 x 11

GB3025/1/3/25	The Land of Nod	1906 (sepia)	41 x 51
GB3025/1/3/26	The Little Faun	1906	20 x 25
GB3025/1/3/27	The Swimmer	1906	20 x 18
GB3025/1/3/28	The Magic Well	1906	18.5 x 24
GB3025/1/3/29	The Swing	Watercolour	17.5 x 23.5
GB3025/1/3/30	The Swing	version 2 1907	18.5 x 23.5
GB3025/1/3/31	Portrait	Charles Sims c1908	14 x 9.5
GB3025/1/3/32	The Little Faun	1908	25 x 30
GB3025/1/3/33	The Swing	2 nd version 1908 (in reverse)	25.5 x 30
GB3025/1/3/34	The Fountain	1908	18 x 22.5
GB3025/1/3/35	Ephemera	1908	17.5 x 20.5
GB3025/1/3/36	Julia	1908	32 x 41
GB3025/1/3/37	Julia	1909 (in reverse)	15.5 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/38	Epilogue	1909	30 x 25.5
GB3025/1/3/39	Portrait	Mrs Hayes Sadler 1909	22.5 x 16.5

GB3025/1/3/40	Mischief	1909	18 x 23
GB3025/1/3/41	Epilogue	1909	18 x 15
GB3025/1/3/42	Epilogue	1909	23 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/43	Cupid & Causpaspe	1910	18 x 14
GB3025/1/3/44	The Crab-Apple Tree	1910	22 x 17.5
GB3025/1/3/45	Sunshine	1910	10 x 14
GB3025/1/3/46	Legend	1910	17 x 22.5
GB3025/1/3/47	“Gentle Love...”	1911	17.5 x 22.5
GB3025/1/3/48	The Shower	1911	27.5 x 40.5
GB3025/1/3/49	The Shower	1911	15 x 23
GB3025/1/3/50	Portrait	Betty Hayes Sadler 1911	23.5 x 17
GB3025/1/3/51	Portrait	Kenneth Clark 1911	23 x 17.5
GB3025/1/3/52	Charles	painting <i>Love in the Wilderness</i> 1912	19 x 14
GB3025/1/3/53	Love in the Wilderness	1912	32 x 41
GB3025/1/3/54	Love in the Wilderness	1912	18 x 23

GB3025/1/3/55	The Wood Beyond the World	1912	16 x 23
GB3025/1/3/56	The Wood Beyond the World	1912	32 x 46
GB3025/1/3/57	Syrid and Pattatos	1912	33 x 42
GB3025/1/3/58	The Month of Mary	1912	20 x 25
GB3025/1/3/59	The Month of Mary	1912	20 x 25
GB3025/1/3/60	The Sweet o' the Year	1912 (reverse)	25 x 20
GB3025/1/3/61	Portrait	Mrs. Sims 1912	22.5 x 13.5
GB3025/1/3/62	The Little Archer	1913 (in reverse)	47 x 37
GB3025/1/3/63	The Little Archer	1913	25 x 20
GB3025/1/3/64	The Basket of Flowers	1913	40 x 32
GB3025/1/3/65	The Coming of Spring	1913 (in reverse)	32 x 41
GB3025/1/3/66	Spring Song	1913	20 x 25
GB3025/1/3/67	Unknown	c1913	25 x 20
GB3025/1/3/68	The Basket of Flowers	1913	25 x 20
GB3025/1/3/69	Syrid and Pattatos	1914 (in reverse)	20 x 25

GB3025/1/3/70	Portrait	Mrs MacWhirter 1914?	19.5 x 15
GB3025/1/3/71	Pastoral	1914 (in reverse)	32 x 41
GB3025/1/3/72	Iris	1915 (in reverse)	28.5 x 36
GB3025/1/3/73	Iris	1915	18 x 22.5
GB3025/1/3/74	Unknown, two figures	Iris series c1915	24 x 32
GB3025/1/3/75	Pastoral	1915	20 x 25
GB3025/1/3/76	Portrait	Mrs Robert Fleming 1915	21 x 18
GB3025/1/3/77	Portrait: <i>The Embroideress</i>	Mrs. Fleming – profile 1916?	17 x 14
GB3025/1/3/78	Water Farm	1916	8.5 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/79	Mural	<i>Crafts</i> for Arts and Crafts exhib. 1916	20 x 41
GB3025/1/3/80	The Piping Boy	1917	17 x 13.5
GB3025/1/3/81	Remembrance	1917	13 x 20
GB3025/1/3/82	Crucifixion	Family with soldier	17 x 17
GB3025/1/3/83	Crucifixion	on display in USA, Knoedler's? 1926 1918	24 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/84	The Stag	date unknown	14.5 x 19

GB3025/1/3/85	Wedgwood	1921	15 x 17
GB3025/1/3/86	Road from Gorbio to Mentone	1921	13.5 x 20
GB3025/1/3/87	The Shower Bath	C1921	60 x 48
GB3025/1/3/88	Portrait	unknown couple in Monte Carlo so 20s	14 x 19.5
GB3025/1/3/89	Portrait	Mrs. Huband Gregg – 20s (Mrs J's mother)	13 x 10.5
GB3025/1/3/90	Portrait	The sons of Ellis Hayim Esq. 1922	15 x 14.5
GB3025/1/3/91	Portrait	Miss Lumley Ellis?	18 x 15
GB3025/1/3/92	Portrait	unknown girl with pearls (after Lady Rocksavage 1922)	24 x 15.5
GB3025/1/3/93	Portrait	Mrs J. and Wynne 1924	8 x 10.5
GB3025/1/3/94	Portrait	King George V 1924	27.5 x 19
GB3025/1/3/95	Portrait	The daughters of P. B. Reckitt Esq. 1924	20 x 14
GB3025/1/3/96	Portrait	Mrs. Konstam 1924	20 x 14
GB3025/1/3/97	Portrait	Professor Hay 1924	32 x 26

GB3025/1/3/98	Portrait	Rt. Hon. The Earl of Balfour 1924	14 x 10
GB3025/1/3/99	<i>Lady Astor</i> portrait	1924	54 x 45
GB3025/1/3/100	<i>Lady Astor</i> portrait	1924	54 x 45
GB3025/1/3/101	<i>Studio of a Painter of Fetes Galantes</i>	1925	15 x 17
GB3025/1/3/102	Portrait	Mary, Marjorie and Sheila, Daughters of J. Wadell Esq. 1925	15 x 18
GB3025/1/3/103	Portrait	unknown woman – Mrs Bryce? 1908?	23 x 17
GB3025/1/3/104	Pastoral	unknown	12 x 17
GB3025/1/3/105	Portrait	Unknown mother and child	14.5 x 10.5
GB3025/1/3/106	Portrait	unknown woman	17 x 14.5
GB3025/1/3/107	Portrait	unknown woman with book	14.5 x 17
GB3025/1/3/108	Portrait	unknown man	17.5 x 14
GB3025/1/3/109	Portrait	unknown man	14 x 10.5

Works on paper (other): GB3025/1/4

GB3025/1/4/1	Ink and pencil drawing <i>The Fates</i>	To be used for drypoint, consequently original is in reverse to finished piece. 1897. Pencil study of kneeling nude on verso	22 x 29
GB3025/1/4/2	Sepia watercolour study of hansom cab and rearing horse	Titled in pencil <i>Time</i>	26 x 18.5
GB3025/1/4/3	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings commissioned by John Lane 1904. Rejected.		21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/4	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings	b. <i>And many a jealous conference had they...</i> on verso.	21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/5	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings	c. <i>I's eyes though wild were yet all dewy...</i> on verso	21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/6	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings	d. <i>And Isabella did not stamp(?) to love...</i> on verso	21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/7	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings	e. <i>Hung over her sweet Basil evermore...</i> on verso	21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/8	<i>Isabella</i> series of mounted ink drawings	f. <i>And yet they knew it was</i> (obscured) <i>face...</i> and pencil sketches on verso	21.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/9	Sketch in red conte (or similar) of female fig in <i>The Top o' the Hill</i>	1901	46.5 x 34

GB3025/1/4/10	Arran mother and child	<i>Playmates</i> , 1902	14 x 19
GB3025/1/4/11	Beach scene with background cottages	Probably Arran, c.1902	20.5 x 28
GB3025/1/4/12	Reclining nude	Possibly Agnes (pregnant?)	28 x 19
GB3025/1/4/13	Small nude child bending, Arran	c.1902. Pencil notes on verso	28 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/14	Agnes in white dress and hat at Arran	c.1902	28 x 20.5
GB3025/1/4/15	Scottish beach scene with houses in background	Probably Arran. Pencil sketch and notes on verso	20.5 x 28
GB3025/1/4/16	Two children on beach	Arran, 1902	20 x 22
GB3025/1/4/17	Mother and three children on the beach	Probably Northern France (Etaples?) c1905	19.5 x 28.5
GB3025/1/4/18	Agnes in dark blue dress and red headscarf	See photographs, Arran probably	28 x 16
GB3025/1/4/19	Young boy in sailor suit	John(?) c. 1903	27.5 x 18.5
GB3025/1/4/20	Canal scene with memorial statue in foreground	Probably Bruges	18.5 x 27
GB3025/1/4/21	<i>Bacchanal</i>		20 x 25.5
GB3025/1/4/22	Mother and Sons		54 x 76

GB3025/1/4/23	Watercolour skyscape mounted on board	Pencilled figures suggest study for <i>The Fountain</i> 1908	26 x 27
GB3025/1/4/24	Mounted watercolour and chalk landscape study/with figures	Titled <i>The Kingdom of the Air</i>	26.5 x 44
GB3025/1/4/25	Study in sepia ink and red pastel	Bacchanalian ceremony. Similar in feel to sketchpad No.6	32 x 24.5
GB3025/1/4/26	Sepia pen and wash sketch	Reclining girl in gypsy-like costume	33 x 42
GB3025/1/4/27	Pencil study of girl on one leg		29 x 23
GB3025/1/4/28	Sepia and pencil study of fountain in reverse		19.5 x 30
GB3025/1/4/29	Red pencil tracing <i>Night Piece to Julia</i>		19 x 27
GB3025/1/4/30	Mounted fresco design	Royal Exchange Panel (rejected) c1911	84 x 56
GB3025/1/4/31	Pencil and sepia ink study squared up	<i>The Coming of Spring</i> 1912	38 x 57
GB3025/1/4/32	Red pencil tracing imprint of couple in garden	<i>Love in the Wilderness</i>	19 x 28
GB3025/1/4/33	Sepia ink and wash study	<i>Love in the Wilderness</i> 1912	19 x 28
GB3025/1/4/34	Crayon study	Five women in robes	44 x 35
GB3025/1/4/35	Pencil study of mother and child	Study for Madonna in foreground in <i>The Wood Beyond the World</i> 1912	49 x 32

GB3025/1/4/36	Two pencil and two sepia ink figure studies	Pencil figure study on verso	38 x 55
GB3025/1/4/37	Female face and arms	Study for <i>Spring Song</i> 1913	38 x 55.5
GB3025/1/4/38	Sepia and pencil studies		19 x 28
GB3025/1/4/39	<i>Basket of Flowers</i>		50 x 32
GB3025/1/4/40	<i>Month of Mary</i>		37.5 x 49
GB3025/1/4/41	Two figures by sea	watercolour	22 x 27
GB3025/1/4/42	Sepia ink and wash study of <i>Syrid and Pattatos</i>	On verso half of <i>Epilogue</i> etching, see nos. 96-101a	23 x 28
GB3025/1/4/43	Study for <i>Pastoral</i> series		
GB3025/1/4/44	Indistinct sepia study	On verso other half of <i>Epilogue</i>	23 x 28
GB3025/1/4/45	Two monochromatic watercolour sketches	Both compositional studies, similar to <i>La Cage aux Amours</i> so c. 1913	38 x 56
GB3025/1/4/46	Pencil life studies of female nudes		28 x 37
GB3025/1/4/47	Pencil study of child's head		32 x 24.5
GB3025/1/4/48	Pencil <i>putti</i> studies	Watercolour sketch of official scene on verso	35 x 25
GB3025/1/4/49	Pencil and charcoal studies of girl	Red crayon nude on verso	38 x 28

GB3025/1/4/50	Pencil drawing of girl in long robe	Watercolour drapery studies on verso	38 x 28
GB3025/1/4/51	Pencil sketch of figures in garden		16 x 10
GB3025/1/4/52	Pencil and ink sketch	Puvis-esque pastoral	32 x 43
GB3025/1/4/53	Pencil study of group of figures in garden	Possibly nativity scene, large lily growing in middle	18 x 20
GB3025/1/4/54	Ink and wash study of figures between trees with angels	Similar on verso	18 x 29
GB3025/1/4/55	Sepia pen and wash sketches of mystical scenes	Two on recto, two on verso, like those in sketchpad no. 6	39 x 55
GB3025/1/4/56	Sepia pen and wash sketches of mystical scenes	Two on recto	39 x 55
GB3025/1/4/57	The Lovers	on paper	44 x 25
GB3025/1/4/58	Ink and wash study of tropical looking garden with steps		17.5 x 25
GB3025/1/4/59	Portrait of young girl overpainting <i>Sacrament</i> study	After 1916, on paper	35 x 25
GB3025/1/4/60	Study of girl's head		28 x 19
GB3025/1/4/61	Mounted tapestry design <i>Dawn</i>	c. war years	26.5 x 34

GB3025/1/4/62	Watercolour design on yellow background	Similar to tapestry design <i>Dawn</i> see No. 27	38 x 55
GB3025/1/4/63	Study for woman in <i>And the Fairies ran away with their clothes</i>	1919	20.5 x 28
GB3025/1/4/64	Alan – study for <i>And the Fairies ran away with their clothes</i>	1919	17.5 x 22
GB3025/1/4/65	Charcoal sketch	Mother and child	31 x 42
GB3025/1/4/66	Charcoal sketch	<i>June</i> (see printed reproduction list)	30 x 50
GB3025/1/4/67	Charcoal sketch	Mother and child	27.5 x 50
GB3025/1/4/68	Pencil and ink sketch	Mother and child	24 x 52
GB3025/1/4/69	Pencil and gouache portrait study on yellow ground	From fashion of dress, 20s	46 x 31
GB3025/1/4/70	Pencil and gouache portrait study on yellow ground		45.5 x 31
GB3025/1/4/71	Yellow sketch	On cardboard	43 x 28
GB3025/1/4/72	Mounted watercolour and pencil study of theatre interior	<i>Studio of a Painter of Fetes Galantes</i> 1925	32 x 38
GB3025/1/4/73	Large colour study of <i>Studio of a Painter ...</i>	Theatre interior	40 x 56

GB3025/1/4/74	Watercolour portrait study	Cloud study on verso	17 x 12.5
GB3025/1/4/75	Hand tinted photograph of male draped in Union Jack with barrel	Ocean Series	8.5 x 12.5
GB3025/1/4/76	Belly dancing woman with black slave and tiger	Ocean Series	8.5 x 12.5
GB3025/1/4/78	Hand tinted photograph of a woman holding up a basket of fruit wearing a leaf skirt	Ocean Series	8.5 x 12.5
GB3025/1/4/79	Pencil life studies of nude female	Pencil note at top <i>Old students deceasing</i>	38 x 28
GB3025/1/4/80	Two <i>Spiritual</i> pencil studies	c.1926 Pencil note on verso <i>Saint or Sinner</i>	32 x 49
GB3025/1/4/81	Two <i>Spiritual</i> pencil studies	c.1926 on brown tracing paper	36 x 45
GB3025/1/4/82	<i>Spiritual</i> pencil study	c.1926 on very thin paper	34 x 22
GB3025/1/4/83	Pencil studies of hand on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	32 x 24
GB3025/1/4/84	Pencil study of nudes	<i>Spiritual</i> style	32 x 24
GB3025/1/4/85	Pencil studies of faces	<i>Spiritual</i> style, another on verso with pencil notes	32 x 24.5
GB3025/1/4/86	Pencil life studies	<i>Spiritual</i> style, more on verso with	25 x 34

		notes	
GB3025/1/4/87	Colour study on brown paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	36 x 28
GB3025/1/4/88	Life drawing in pencil – female nude	Male nude on verso	30 x 23
GB3025/1/4/89	Pencil studies on graph paper	More on verso	28 x 21.5
GB3025/1/4/90	Pencil studies on graph paper	More on verso	28 x 21.5
GB3025/1/4/91	Pencil study on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	25 x 18.5
GB3025/1/4/92	Pencil study on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	25 x 21
GB3025/1/4/93	Pencil and ink study on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	33 x 25
GB3025/1/4/94	Pencil study on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	32.5 x 25.5
GB3025/1/4/95	Pencil study on white paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	43 x 35
GB3025/1/4/96	Pencil and ink studies on tracing paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style	32 x 49
GB3025/1/4/97	Pencil study of hands on paper	<i>Spiritual</i> style Life drawings on verso	34 x 44
GB3025/1/4/98	Caricature of female nude in red pencil		33 x 21.5
GB3025/1/4/99	Pencil study	<i>Spiritual</i> style	44 x 35
GB3025/1/4/100	Pencil study	<i>Spiritual</i> style	34 x 55

GB3025/1/4/101	Pencil study	<i>Spiritual style</i>	51 x 39
GB3025/1/4/102	Pencil studies	<i>Spiritual style</i>	60 x 46
GB3025/1/4/103	Charcoal and red pencil figure study		62 x 48
GB3025/1/4/104	Life drawing of female nude	Red pencil	33 x 22
GB3025/1/4/105	Pencil study of female nude		38 x 27.5
GB3025/1/4/106	Charcoal portrait sketch	Unknown man	35 x 28
GB3025/1/4/107	Charcoal portrait sketch	Unknown reading man	42 x 34
GB3025/1/4/108	Charcoal portrait sketches	Unknown man (see No. 64)	48 x 32
GB3025/1/4/109	Charcoal studies of horse	Folded sheet	57 x 39
GB3025/1/4/110	Ink drawing of couple in historical costume	Influenced by Fortescue Brickdale or Byam Shaw possibly	17.5 x 21
GB3025/1/4/111	Watercolour of nude child in landscape		12.5 x 16.5
GB3025/1/4/112	Charcoal portrait study of man on tracing paper		31 x 22
GB3025/1/4/113	Pencil portrait study of reading woman		30 x 23.5
GB3025/1/4/114	Charcoal sketch of man on tracing paper		25 x 20

GB3025/1/4/115	Pen and wash study of woman at dressing table with maid	Looks like bookplate design or similar	21 x 29
GB3025/1/4/116	Watercolour and pencil study of reading man in chair	Signed C. Sims Esq. (could be title and therefore portrait of, not by Sims)	24 x 19.5
GB3025/1/4/117	Watercolour study of couple in medieval dress under tree	Pencil sketch of steps and plants on verso	17 x 27.5
GB3025/1/4/118	Landscape study in ink and pencil		22 x 41
GB3025/1/4/119	Landscape study in ink and pencil		28 x 52
GB3025/1/4/120	Sepia pen and wash study	Unknown pastoral with tower, pencil notes at top	48 x 38
GB3025/1/4/121	Pencil landscape	Foliage study on verso	25.5 x 35
GB3025/1/4/122	Pencil landscape with corn stacks	Landscape with wagon or gypsy caravan on verso	25.5 x 35
GB3025/1/4/123	Sepia ink and crayon landscape		24.5 x 32
GB3025/1/4/124	Watercolour landscape study		34 x 26
GB3025/1/4/125	Charcoal and pastel cloud studies		23 x 35
GB3025/1/4/126	Skyscape with mountains in watercolour and pastel		24 x 34

GB3025/1/4/127	Watercolour seascape with cliffs	26 x 37.5
GB3025/1/4/128	Pencil sketch of trees on edge of large sheet	29 x 54
GB3025/1/4/129	Watercolour or gouache sketch of figure(s) in bed (or gondola). River in background	31 x 46
GB3025/1/4/130	Mounted watercolour sketches of skyscapes	(mount) 32 x 49
GB3025/1/4/131	Mounted watercolour and pastel sketches of skyscapes	(mount) 32 x 49.5
GB3025/1/4/132	Mounted watercolour sketches of sea/skyscapes	(mount) 49 x 32
GB3025/1/4/133	Mounted watercolour and pastel landscape studies	(mount) 32 x 49.5
GB3025/1/4/134	Watercolour study of sunset on grey paper	11 x 18
GB3025/1/4/135	Pencil sketch of ornamental pillar	22.5 x 15
GB3025/1/4/136	Pencil sketches of façade	22.5 x 15
GB3025/1/4/137	Cloud study on grey paper	11 x 18
GB3025/1/4/138	Watercolour cloud study	12 x 17.5
GB3025/1/4/139	Watercolour cloud study	12 x 17.5
GB3025/1/4/140	Watercolour cloud study	12 x 17.5

GB3025/1/4/141	Watercolour cloud study		12 x 17.5
GB3025/1/4/142	Pencil sketch of statue	Titled in pencil Milan	22.5 x 15
GB3025/1/4/143	Pencil study of plants		16.5 x 25
GB3025/1/4/144	Watercolour study of figures on beach		15 x 26.5
GB3025/1/4/145	Watercolour landscape	Looks like Essex c.1905	16 x 24.5
GB3025/1/4/146	Ink and wash study of group in medieval clothing under tree	See no.151	17 x 22.5
GB3025/1/4/147	Large watercolour exterior with child	Probably not by Sims (possibly Agnes?)	54 x 76
GB3025/1/4/148	Colour study of shop interior	Looks Spanish	35 x 22.5
GB3025/1/4/149	Watercolour, pencil inscription <i>Civilization and Bohemia</i>	War scene with photographer – not sure if this is by Sims or not	24.5 x 30
GB3025/1/4/150	Figure study of woman in pink dress with hat	Arran? (Late addition to list)	28 x 19
GB3025/1/4/151	Sketch for Lord Blanesburgh	1925	29 x 24.5
GB3025/1/4/152	Statue and Boy	Watercolour c1906	33 x 23
GB3025/1/4/153	Dutch landscape with canal and boat	Pencil notes and sketches on verso	20.5 x 28.5
GB3025/1/4/154	Dutch landscape with windmill	c1900	20 x 28

GB3025/1/4/155	Study for <i>The Pavilion</i>	1913	19 x 28
GB3025/1/4/156	Three nude figures on beach		16 x 18.5
GB3025/1/4/157	The Vine	c1896	16 x 24
GB3025//1/4/158	The Vine	c1896	16 x 24
GB3025/1/4/159	Landscape with Trees		16 x 25
GB3025/1/4/160	River Scene through Archway		29 x 20
GB3025/1/4/161	¾ study of head	unknown woman on board	53 x 38
GB3025/1/4/162	Park Scene	Bruges	20 x 29
GB3025/1/4/163	Park and Lake	Bruges	20 x 29
GB3025/1/4/164	Royal Crown	Study for George V portrait 1924	
GB3025/1/4/165	Colour study for <i>Spirituals</i>	C1926	45 x 31

Red envelope:

GB3025/1/5/1-7	Photographs of Seven Sacraments:	<i>Confirmation</i> <i>Extreme Unction</i> <i>Communion</i>	15 x 19
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*Penance
Baptism
Marriage
Orders*

GB3025/1/5/8	Five Sheets of notes		
GB3025/1/5/9-14	Six photographs of the <i>Spirituals</i> :	<i>I am the abyss and I am Light</i> <i>Behold I have Graven thee on the palm of my hand</i> <i>Here am I</i> <i>The rebel powers that thee array</i> <i>Man's last pretence of consummation in indifference</i> <i>My pain beneath your sheltering hand</i>	14.5 x 18.5

Works on panel: GB3025/2

GB3025/2/3	Two Nude Babies on Beach	Arran c.1902	13.5 x 32
GB3025/2/4	Two Children on Beach Arran c.1902	Cow Parsley and Fox Glove Study on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/5	Boy in Landscape	c1905	30 x 45
GB3025/2/6	Arran boys by the sea		
GB3025/2/7	The Little Faun	Sketch for woman on left c1906	35 x 25
GB3025/2/8	Sea Scape		25 x 35

GB3025/2/9	Study of Bombed Building	c1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/10	War Study	War Study on verso 1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/11	War Scene	1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/12	War Scene	1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/13	War Scene	1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/14	War Scene	1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/15	War Scene	1918	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/16	Thames at Hammersmith	C1920	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/17	Landscape	Sunrise	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/20	Landscape		20 x 29
GB3025/2/21	Figures in a Play		19 x 29
GB3025/2/22	Figures in a Play Outdoors		19 x 29
GB3025/2/23	Sketch for a Portrait of Lady		29 x 20
GB3025/2/27	Landscape	Southern France	20 x 29
GB3025/2/28	Landscape	Southern France	20 x 29

GB3025/2/29	Landscape with Lake		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/30	Seascape	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/31	Trees in Sunshine	Haystack and Sunset on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/32	Dog Roses	Child's Head on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/33	Forest	Landscape with Trees on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/34	Landscape with Misty Hills	Tree Studies on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/35	Meadow with Lake and Cow	Leaf Studies on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/36	Landscape with Houses	Landscape with Sea on Horizon on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/37	Fields and Lake	Paddling Feet on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/38	Study of Sea	Study of Sea on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/39	Forest	Reflections Study on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/40	Seascape with Sunset	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/41	Tree Studies	Tree Studies on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/42	Landscape with Tree on Hill	Harbour Study with Cliffs on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/43	Landscape	Landscape with Mountains on verso	12.5 x 21.5

GB3025/2/44	Snowy Landscape	Meadow with Lakes and Trees on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/45	Skyscape	Skyscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/46	Trees and Hills	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/47	Landscape	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/48	Village Street Scene	Possibly Sussex	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/49	Landscape		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/50	Avenue	Trees Study on verso, probably McWhirter	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/51	Night Scene House with Lamp	Moonlit Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/52	Lake Study	Landscape with Bushes on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/53	Landscape with Hills	Evening Landscape with Hills on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/54	Lake and Trees	Forest on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/55	Landscape with Houses Probably Sussex	Path Through Trees on verso, probably not English	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/56	Winter Landscape with Snow		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/57	Cliff Studies	Mountain Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5

GB3025/2/58	Landscape	Tree Sketches on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/59	Foliage	Foliage on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/60	Landscape Far Off Town		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/61	Moonlit Hill	Landscape with Town on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/62	Trees	Dark Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/63	Landscape	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/64	Tree studies	Tree studies on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/65	Landscape	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/66	Seascape	Skyscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/67	Landscape with River		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/69	Landscape with lake	Landscape with trees on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/70	Landscape	Landscape on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/71	Trees	Dog Roses on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/72	Bombed Building		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/73	Trees	Fields on verso	12.5 x 21.5

GB3025/2/74	Trees (badly affected by bloom)	Trees on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/75	Study of Farm Buildings	Study of Church and House on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/76	Village from Fields		12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/77	Red Buildings Through Trees	Garden Urn on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/78	Landscape	Tree study on verso	12.5 x 21.5
GB3025/2/79	Landscape		

Works on canvas: GB3025/3

GB3025/3/1	Harbour scene	Possibly Musselburgh or Holland c. 1896-7	20 x 28
GB3025/3/2	Self Portrait	c. 1900. Nude looking in mirror on verso (probably later)	30 x 23.5
GB3025/3/3	Landscape with buildings in background	Possibly Essex, c. 1899-1902. Recycled canvas.	23.5 x 31.5
GB3025/3/5	Portrait of Amy	Heavily varnished	27 x 24.5
GB3025/3/6	Seascape with waves on rocks		22 x 31
GB3025/3/7	Cloudy valley	Welsh or Scottish	22 x 30

GB3025/3/8	Exterior study of woman in blue dress	Agnes, c.1902	22.5 x 30.5
GB3025/3/9	Exterior study of reclining woman	Agnes, c.1902	22.5 x 30
GB3025/3/10	Arran, John and Alan on the beach	c.1902	22.5 x 31
GB3025/3/11	Portrait of Agnes, exterior	c.1902	22.5 x 29.5
GB3025/3/12	Study of Agnes in blue dress, hair down		30.5 x 24.5
GB3025/3/13	Study of Agnes in a hat on the beach, barefoot paddling	Possibly Arran c.1902	31 x 23.5
GB3025/3/14	Figure study of woman in pink	Study for <i>By Summer Seas</i> , c1904	19 x 28
GB3025/3/15	Nude boy bending backwards, exterior		28 x 19
GB3025/3/16	Figure study, child in shorts		28 x 19
GB3025/3/17	Woman in blue dress on beach, with two pairs of hands	Probably Arran, probably Agnes, c.1902	21 x 25.5
GB3025/3/18	Study of woman in blue dress, on grass	Probably Agnes	20 x 21.5
GB3025/3/19	Study of baby's head		14 x 21
GB3025/3/20	Nude child climbing on rocks	Arran c. 1902 Sketch of woman on verso	28.5 x 19.5

GB3025/3/21	Seascape with land on horizon	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/22	Canal scene	Probably Bruges c. 1905 19.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/23	Park with buildings in background	Similar in style to no. 105 19.5 x 27.5
GB3025/3/24	Canal scene	Probably Bruges 18 x 28.5
GB3025/3/25	Canal scene with large church/castle in background	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/27	Canal scene	Probably Bruges, early 1905 18 x 24
GB3025/3/28	Figure in garden	39 x 35
GB3025/3/29	Tree in blossom	43 x 28.5
GB3025/3/30	The Crab-Apple Tree	43 x 30
GB3025/3/31	Two studies of baby	35 x 56
GB3025/3/32	Study for <i>The Fountain</i>	Mounted on board. 1907 Provenance: 'Early sketch for "The Fountain" by Charles Sims, RA, purchased by the Chantrey Bequest, and now in the Tate Gallery. Signed A. Sims.'
GB3025/3/33	Study for <i>The Fountain</i>	1907 20.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/34	Mother and baby	c.1910, Peter (last son) 22 x 40

GB3025/3/35	Study of woman	c.1910. Agnes (wife), same canvas as no.30.	39.5 x 21.5
GB3025/3/36	Mother and child study		18 x 28
GB3025/3/37	Study for Mother and Child	Probably Laing Art Gallery work	19.5 x 28
GB3025/3/38	Mother and child with green curtain		21 x 28
GB3025/3/39	Self portrait	Landscape with <i>repoussoir</i> tree on verso	22 x 17.5
GB3025/3/40	Park with lake and trees. Overpainted <i>putti</i> and dancing group in background	Figures are similar to <i>Wood beyond the World</i> and <i>Month of Mary</i> both 1912	19 x 28
GB3025/3/41	Pastoral landscape study with foreground figures and sheep	Pencil notes on verso. Possibly Sussex.	19 x 28
GB3025/3/42	The Month of Mary		37.5 x 49
GB3025/3/43	La Cage aux Amours	heavily varnished	55 x 32
GB3025/3/44	Red draped figure	holds barrel on boat	58 x 37
GB3025/3/46	Study for <i>The Pavilion</i> , oval composition blocked in	1913	17.5 x 26.5
GB3025/3/47	Young girl in blue dress	<i>Clio</i> 1913	27.5 x 18
GB3025/3/48	Young girl in white dress		19 x 26.5

GB3025/3/49	Study for main figure in Pastoral	c.1914	36 x 24
GB3025/3/50	Study of Woman in white	c. 1914.	26 x 31
GB3025/3/52	Study of girl's head and hand		23.5 x 20
GB3025/3/53	Study for <i>The Basket of Flowers</i>	1914	21.5 x 15.5
GB3025/3/54	Figure in yellow, storm clouds and hills in background	woman's profile on verso	31 x 40
GB3025/3/55	Four figures on stage, exterior		19 x 28.5
GB3025/3/56	Theatre study	interior with actors and audience	38 x 53
GB3025/3/57	Interior	Figures in bed, butler with tea tray	41 x 44
GB3025/3/58	Landscape with boats	Design for Arts and Crafts Exhibition 1916 on verso	33.5 x 34
GB3025/3/59	Sacrament?	1915-17	29 x 43
GB3025/3/60	Japanese influenced landscape with crucifixes	See tapestry design, <i>Dawn</i> , War Memorials Tapestry Guild, 1918-19	15.5 x 23
GB3025/3/61	War study	France	34 x 54
GB3025/3/62	Study of lady's legs	Study of Union Jack with laurel wreath on verso, possibly graphic work c.1918	20.5 x 34

GB3025/3/63	Study for <i>And the Fairies ran away with their clothes</i>	Mounted on board, c1919	22.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/64	Mediterranean landscape		24 x 33
GB3025/3/65	Two nude figures holding baby on beach	<i>Wedgwood</i> 1921	17 x 25
GB3025/3/66	Study of sanitorium/pavilion	Probably war years. Oil sketch of window on verso	22.5 x 19.5
GB3025/3/67	Two mother and son studies. First, interior. Second, exterior (June)	Five figures on verso	34 x 21
GB3025/3/68	Sketch in red pencil on canvas	<i>Studio of a Painter of Fetes Galantes</i> 1925	55 x 65
GB3025/3/69	Figure study, possibly angel	French canvas	28 x 19
GB3025/3/70	Study of boy's head		17.5 x 22
GB3025/3/71	Girl with drapery (tent?)		27.5 x 18.5
GB3025/3/72	Study of young girl's head		28 x 19
GB3025/3/73	Standing nude boy, back view		27 x 25.5
GB3025/3/74	Walking nude boy		23 x 23.5
GB3025/3/75	Standing nude youth	Pencil measurements on verso	28 x 19

GB3025/3/76	Red-headed girl with pencil notes	27 x 22.5
GB3025/3/77	Dark-haired child	22 x 26
GB3025/3/78	Tree	41 x 28
GB3025/3/79	Statue in garden	39 x 48
GB3025/3/80	English landscape	19 x 28
GB3025/3/81	Landscape with young trees	19 x 28
GB3025/3/82	Forest landscape	19 x 28
GB3025/3/83	Farmland with foreground trees	19 x 28
GB3025/3/84	Night time river scene	19 x 26
GB3025/3/85	Calm seascape	19.5 x 28
GB3025/3/86	Calm seascape	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/87	Seascape with foreground shrubbery	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/88	Moorland study with stream	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/89	Farmland study with chickens	24 x 31
GB3025/3/90	Tree study with sea in background	30 x 21

Quite impasto
On French canvas
Bathing pool written on verso
Pencil notes on verso

The Henwife study
Probably Mediterranean

GB3025/3/91	Sunset over beach scene	21.5 x 31.5
GB3025/3/92	Seascape with foreground rock formation	23 x 30
GB3025/3/93	Sea study	23.5 x 30
GB3025/3/94	Seascape with breakers	22 x 31
GB3025/3/95	Seascape	22.5 x 31
GB3025/3/96	Rocky landscape	23 x 30
GB3025/3/97	English landscape with tree	28 x 19
GB3025/3/98	Woodland study with stream	20 x 28
GB3025/3/99	Shrubbery	19 x 28
GB3025/3/100	Landscape with bridge	20 x 28.5
GB3025/3/101	Landscape with stream in foreground	28 x 17.5
GB3025/3/102	Parkland with pool and trees	20 x 28.5
GB3025/3/103	Stream with rock and foliage	20 x 28.5
GB3025/3/104	River with buildings and trees	19 x 28

George Rowney Sketching Paper stamp
on verso

Possibly Dutch. Trees similar to those
used in *The Wood Beyond the World*
1912

GB3025/3/105	Woodland with stream	Sketched in ultramarine	18.5 x 23
GB3025/3/106	Tree covered in daisies	Possibly not by Sims – MacWhirter?	16 x 23.5
GB3025/3/107	Cloud study		19 x 28
GB3025/3/108	Landscape with railway bridge		19 x 28
GB3025/3/109	Forest with stream		28 x 19
GB3025/3/110	Cloud study		20.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/111	Landscape with <i>repoussoir</i> tree	Pencilled no. 5 on verso	28 x 19
GB3025/3/112	View across field to forest		19 x 28
GB3025/3/113	Beach scene with foreground sketched figures	Pencil notes and sketches on verso	20.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/114	Woodland with stream and cattle		19 x 28
GB3025/3/115	Upturned boat in sea		20 x 28.5
GB3025/3/116	Canal scene with trees	Trees like those in <i>Wood Beyond the World</i>	18.5 x 28
GB3025/3/117	Landscape with foreground pool and sheep in background	Rowney sketching paper stamp on verso	19 x 28
GB3025/3/118	Farmland with corn stocks		19 x 28

GB3025/3/119	Rocky landscape	20.5 x 28
GB3025/3/120	Farmland with cattle	19 x 28
GB3025/3/121	Beach scene	20.5 x 28.5
GB3025/3/122	Wooded landscape with foreground stream	19 x 28.5
GB3025/3/123	Foliage study	19 x 28
GB3025/3/124	Cloud study	19.5 x 28.5

Sketchpads and Notebooks: GB3025/4

GB3025/4/1	32 x 48 leather bound sketchpad with 27 pages containing stuck in sketches.	Early.
GB3025/4/2	20 x 13 black canvas bound pocket sketchpad. Reeves and Son "The Press Sketch Book." 56 pages, 44 loose sheets.	Includes sketches for portrait of Agnes of 1898. Loose sheets include sketches for spirituals – therefore far later than the attached pages in book.
GB3025/4/3	13 x 18 canvas bound sketchbook with 25½ pages of watercolour quality paper. Whatman Sketch Book manufactured by Geo. Rowney and Co. Series A 50.	Mostly watercolour land and seascapes, but also portraits of Agnes in a straw hat. Landscapes are possibly Scotland but are difficult to date.
GB3025/4/4	18 x 11 leather covered sketchpad with 41 pages and one loose sheet. Manufactured by	C1905, Northern France (Etaples, Paris Plage) and Bruges.

GB3025/4/5	Chas. H. West, Artist's Colourman. 19 x 26 leather bound sketchpad with 18 pages. Manufactured by Reeves and Sons.	Watercolour landscape studies look like Essex and Scotland which dates these before 1905. Other studies of people on beach, striped tents, French flags on sandcastles. Reminiscent of Wilson Steer's Brittany works, probably are Northern France (Etaples) which dates them between July 1904 and Spring 1905. Others look Dutch (windmill on horizon) or possibly Bruges.
GB3025/4/6	14 x 10 canvas covered sketchpad with elastic fastener. Winsor and Newton Ltd, Sketchers' Note Book.	Contains sketches of <i>Epilogue</i> of 1909 (probably drawn from the finished painting) and preparatory sketches of <i>The Basket of Flowers</i> 1913.
GB3025/4/7	17.5 x 11 canvas bound pocket sketchpad with 51 serrated pages.	Includes sketches for <i>The Little Archer</i> and <i>The Basket of Flowers</i> both 1913.
GB3025/4/8	13 x 18 canvas covered sketchpad with 27 pages and 5 loose sheets. Manufactured by Geo. Rowney and Co. Series A 55.	Mainly landscape studies in pencil and ink, probably Sussex and possibly Northern Europe. Pencil notes on inside cover refer to <i>Syrid and Pattatos</i> 1914, and <i>Stormy Weather</i> 1913 so probably dates from around this time. Drawings look confident and mature.
GB3025/4/9	Disbound 23 x 29 sketchpad with 68 loose pages of various colours and qualities.	Includes sepia landscape studies and sketches for the <i>Seven Sacraments</i> which dates it at c1916-17.
GB3025/4/10	13 x 18 canvas covered sketchpad. "Canvas Cover" Sketch Book manufactured by Rowney, Series A 55 with 24 pages of cartridge paper and one loose sheet.	Contains sketches of soldiers, one dated 1918 and design for war-time poster.

GB3025/4/11	10 x 18 canvas covered sketchpad with 29 pages. Whatman Sketch Book manufactured by Geo. Rowney and Co. Series A 50.	Dated on inside June 1916, February 1917. Contains sepia pen and wash drawings, highly detailed, Blakean. I suspect it dates from later than date written on inside cover, more likely to be early 20s.
GB3025/4/12	25.5 x 20.5 leather bound sketchpad with 57 pages (c. half of them blank).	Manufactured by John B. Smith, 117 Hampstead Road, London. Figure studies mainly, recognisable twenties fashions. Also includes sketch for portrait of Professor Hay. 1924
GB3025/4/13	18.5 x 25.5 leather bound sketchpad with 22 pages and 3 loose sheets.	Whatman's paper manufactured by Reeves and Sons Ltd. Mostly watercolour compositional studies for portraits. Womens' fashion in these studies looks like early twenties, not Edwardian.
GB3025/4/14	25 x 35.5 sketchpad with 26.5 pages and one loose sheet.	'The Cambridge "Pencil-Chalk" Sketch Books '61' (Deep Cream)' manufactured by Madderton and Co. Ltd, Loughton, Essex. Figure studies in 20s fashions.
GB3025/4/15	25 x 35.5 sketchpad with 23 pages and 19 loose pages. Badly damaged spine, very fragile.	'The Cambridge "Pencil-Chalk" Sketch Books '61' (Deep Cream)' manufactured by Madderton and Co. Ltd, Loughton, Essex. Studies for family portrait (mother and two daughters) and for <i>Spiritual</i> series which dates from c1926.
GB3025/4/16	25 x 35.5 sketchpad with 29 pages and 2 loose sheets.	'The Cambridge "Pencil-Chalk" Sketch Books '61' (Deep Cream)' manufactured by Madderton and Co. Ltd, Loughton, Essex. Nude male youth studies and more recognisable compositional sketches for the <i>Spiritual</i> series. (See No. 11). 1927

GB3025/4/17	11 x18 “Reporters” style notebook with 61 lined pages and one inserted loose sheet.	Copious studio notes, memory aids and jottings about the technique of other artists. Notes work from both ends of the book, first dated entry from front of book is 29.6.95 and from the back is March 1 st 1905. Also however refers to <i>The Little Faun</i> 1906 and <i>The Fountain</i> 1908 so it would appear that it spans c1895-1908.
GB3025/4/18	22.5 x 16.5 leather bound notebook with 129 lined pages and 4 loose sheets.	First dated entry January 15 th 1909 last one is March 26 th 1920. Includes notes for <i>Picture Making and Technique</i> .
GB3025/4/19	16 x 9.5 notebook with 48 lined pages and 3 loose sheets.	Sketches and notes referring to the <i>Spirituals</i> so c.1926.

Glass Plate Negatives: GB3025/5

GB3025/5/1	Water Babies 1903	Text reads: 33337 C-Sims 14.3.03 <i>Water Babies</i> Sticker reads: 31841	20 x 25
GB3025/5/2	The Kite 1905	Text reads: 37884 C- Sims C 22.3.05 <i>The Kite</i> Sticker reads: 34939	20 x 25
GB3025/5/3	Soda and Milk 1904	Text reads: 37885 PM – Sims C 22.3.05 <i>Soda and Milk</i>	20 x 25
GB3025/5/4	Land of Nod 1906	Text reads: 39893 C – Sims C. 30.3.06 <i>Land of Nod</i> Sticker reads: 36354	20 x 25
GB3025/5/5	Romance 1907	Text reads: 41893 PM – Sims C. 29.3.07 Sticker reads: 38143	20 x 25

GB3025/5/6	The Swing 1907	Text reads: 41892 PM – Sims C 29.3.07 Swing Sticker reads: 38144	20 x 25
GB3025/5/7	The Swimmers 1906	Text reads: 43627 C – Sims C 1.4.08 <i>The Swimmers</i> Sticker reads: 39778	25 x 20
GB3025/5/8	The Swing 1907	Text reads: 43626 C – Sims 1.4.08 <i>The Swing</i> Sticker reads: 39779	20 x 25
GB3025/5/9	The Little Faun 1906	Text reads: 43507 C – Sims C 28.3.08 <i>Young Faun</i> Sticker reads: 39780	20 x 25
GB3025/5/10	Ephemera 1908	Text reads: 50659 C – Sims C 4.4.09 <i>Ephemera</i> Sticker reads: 41109	20 x 25
GB3025/5/11	Mrs. Hayes Sadler 1909	Text reads: 52316 C – Sims C 23.3.10 Mrs <i>Hayes Sadler</i> Sticker reads: 42761	25 x 20
GB3025/5/12	Mischief 1909	Text reads: 52477 C – Sims C 31.3.10 <i>Mischief</i> Sticker reads: 42762	20 x 25
GB3025/5/13	Unknown	Text reads: 52317 C – Sims C 23.3.10 Sticker reads: 42763	25 x 20
GB3025/5/14	<i>The Crab Apple Tree</i> 1910	Text reads: 54512 C – Sims C 2.3.11 <i>Apple=Tree</i> Sticker reads: 44384	25 x 20
GB3025/5/15	Legend 1910	Text reads: 54511 C – Sims C. 1.4.11 <i>Legend</i> Sticker reads: 44385	20 x 25

GB3025/5/16	A Spring Muse 1910	Text reads: 56426 C – Sims C. 12.4.12 A <i>Spring Muse</i> Sticker reads: 46103	20 x 25
GB3025/5/17	<i>Portrait of Kenneth Clark</i> 1911	Text reads: 56425 C – Sims C 2.4.12 <i>Kenneth</i> Sticker reads: 46105	25 x 20
GB3025/5/18	<i>The Wood Beyond the World</i> 1912	Text reads: 58789 – Sims C 5.4.13 <i>Wood beyond World</i> Sticker reads: 47693	20 x 25
GB3025/5/19	Portrait of Betty Hayes Sadler 1911	Text reads: 56424 C – Sims C 2.4.12 <i>Betty Sadler</i> Sticker reads: 46104	25 x 20
GB3025/5/20	A Portrait (of Mrs. Sims?) 1912	Text reads: 58791 – Sims C 5.4.13. A <i>Portrait</i> Sticker reads: 47695	25 x 20
GB3025/5/21	<i>Love in the Wilderness</i> 1912	Text reads: 58792 – Sims C 6.4.13 <i>Love in the Wilderness</i> Sticker reads: 47696	20 x 25
GB3025/5/22	Month of Mary 1912	Text reads: 58793 – Sims C 5.4.13 <i>Month Mary</i> Sticker reads: 47697	20 x 25
GB3025/5/23	<i>La Cage aux Amours</i> 1913	Text reads: 61243 <i>Sims</i> – Sims C 4.4.14 <i>La Cage aux Amours</i> Sticker reads: 48955	25 x 20
GB3025/5/24	The Penitent 1913	Text reads: 61246 <i>Sims</i> – Sims C 4.4.14 <i>The Penitent</i> Sticker reads: 48957	20 x 25
GB3025/5/25	The Little Archer 1913	Text reads: 61244 <i>Sims</i> – Sims C 4.4.14 <i>Little Archer</i> Sticker reads: 48958	25 x 20

GB3025/5/26	<i>Portrait of Mrs. MacWhirter</i> 1914	Text reads: 62797 Sims 31.5.15 <i>Portrait</i> Sticker reads: 50390	25 x 20
GB3025/5/27	<i>Iris</i> 1915	Text reads: 63715 – Sims C 15.3.16 <i>Iris</i> Sticker reads: 51257	20 x 25
GB3025/5/28	<i>Portrait of Mrs. Val Fleming</i> 1915	Text reads: 63714 II – Sims C 15.3.16 <i>A</i> <i>Portrait</i> Sticker reads: 51258	25 x 20
GB3025/5/29	<i>Clio and the Children</i> 1913	Text reads: 63716 – Sims C 15.4.16 <i>Clio</i> and <i>Children</i> Sticker reads: 51259	20 x 25